

Imperial Travelers: The Formation of West African Urban Culture, Identity, and
Citizenship in London and Accra, 1925-1935

by

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Dedication

For Carroll Smith-Rosenberg
Whose example it is my greatest ambition to emulate

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Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction: Africa, the Empire, and the World	1
Chapter 2 Students, Citizenship, Nationhood and a West African Public Sphere in London	27
Chapter 3 Who is a British Subject? Questioning Imperial Boundaries and Rights	99
Chapter 4 From Lombard Street, London to High Street, Accra: Introducing Accra’s Public Sphere of Clubs and Newspapers	128
Chapter 5 Creating Accra “Society” in the <i>West Africa Times</i>	203
Chapter 6 Constructing a Modern Nation in the “Ladies’ Corner”	237
Chapter 7 Conclusion: Rethinking Citizenship and Empire after 1935.....	326
Bibliography	336

Abstract

Imperial Travelers: The Formation of West African Urban Culture, Identity, and
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Co-Chairs: Mamadou Diouf and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg

At the end of the First World War, increasing numbers of West Africans traveled to London to pursue degrees in higher education. Their educational experiences abroad presented new political and social opportunities. While living in London, and later as members of West Africa's urban and educated elite, these students founded a West African public sphere of clubs and newspapers in which they attempted to form a modern West African nation and subject.

This dissertation is an historical study of this process as it developed in London and Accra between 1925 and 1935. As these students traveled between metropolitan, colonial and African spaces, they engaged in a type of "imperial citizenship" that involved using the institutions of public spheres, empires, and nations, and blending concepts of modern governments and citizenship, internationalism and co-operation,

national self-determination, self-help, and racial equality to create an increasingly empowered position for West Africa within the Empire. The nation they envisioned stood in sharp contrast to the political structures associated with British colonial policies of indirect rule. Their nation was to be a singular, self-governing, united West African nation. At its core would be an educated citizenry of men and women, and critically, a monogamous couple and nuclear family.

In London, the students' political endeavors focused on the establishment of a West African presence within the Empire and the international community through the founding of the West African Students' Union. In Accra, the students struggled to create "modern" subjects out of a diverse group of locally-educated Africans whose modernity would legitimize their claim for self-government. They used the newspapers and clubs of Accra to "educate" locally-educated men and women about how to be "West Africans." These efforts included newspaper articles on appropriate dress and behavior in public, alongside examples of "respectable" courtship practices and marriages. Their advice to readers on how to be citizens of West Africa met with fierce resistance that involved heated debates in the press between former WASU members and locally-educated readers on gender, love, marriage, and family—issues that I argue were central to western-educated West Africans' articulation of nationhood and citizenship.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Africa, the Empire, and the World

Twentieth-century British West Africa was the site of multiple migration patterns. One of the most critical took elite young men and women from the coastal cities to educational centers in Great Britain, and after years of study brought them home again. These men and women, most notably J. B. Danquah, H. O. Davies, Mabel Dove, J. W. de Graft-Johnson, Eyo Ita, and H. J. Lightfoot Boston, would later play a significant role in decolonization, and would help guide new African states during their initial phase of development. Their educational experiences in London had a profound effect on their history, and on the history of modern Anglophone West Africa.

In London, these students experimented with different political and cultural visions for the future of their home countries. As members of the West African Students' Union (WASU), established in 1925, they promoted a self-governing, united West African nation that encompassed the four territories of British West Africa: the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the Gold Coast. They modeled their new nation after the commonwealth, and argued for its development within a reformed British Empire. Their vision of an Anglophone united West African nation lay outside of colonial structures, and was part of the more politically hopeful realm of empire that was, at this time, actively being re-imagined as a "co-operative" empire. In dialogue with post-war new

internationalism, they argued that the newly imagined empire would encourage West Africa's national self-determination.

The students' proposal for a united West African nation was as political as it was cultural. It required that they invent a new relationship among four distinct territories whose common bonds were tenuous and largely determined by British and European colonial and imperial endeavors. The majority of the students' political and cultural work to create West Africa and a West African identity was primarily performed within two critically important public institutions: clubs and newspapers. Through these institutions, the students invented a West African national and cultural identity in the heart of the British Empire. As West Africans, they represented a "West African public opinion" in the British press, in their meetings with Members of Parliament and the Colonial Office, and at international conferences and events. Through their club magazine, *Wasu*, the students educated each other and the British public about the histories and customs of each country, and, in the process, articulated a shared set of "West African" values, cultural practices and traditions. At their club house (located in central London) they hosted lectures on West Africa, entertained prominent West Africans and British colonial administrators, and held events that celebrated West African unity, self-help, and co-operation.

The West African nation promoted through WASU was part of a longer history of African students traveling between metropolitan and colonial spaces for higher education. Before and after the First World War, it was common practice for students to join and found clubs. The majority of students from British West Africa were members of the Union of Students of African Descent (USAD) and the African Progress Union (APU) in

London. Some students formed country-specific clubs, such as the Gold Coast Students' Association (GCSA) and the Nigerian Progress Union (NPU). The founding of WASU, a club specifically for West African students, marked a change in the way that students from British West Africa thought about the political future of their home countries.

By 1925, the idea of West Africa as a region within the British Empire had already gained the attention of university-educated West Africans. In 1919, Gold Coast lawyer and political activist J. E. Casely Hayford used the imperial category British West Africa to found the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) in Accra (the capital city of present-day Ghana). The NCBWA urged West Africans to unite as British West Africans and to argue collectively for self-government within the British Empire. The NCBWA was shaped by Casely Hayford's own educational experiences in London (before the war), particularly his encounters with dominion nationalisms and pan-Africanisms. The cohort of students that formed WASU was deeply inspired by Casely Hayford and the NCBWA. In fact, it was a member of the NCBWA, Dr. Bankole-Bright from Sierra Leone, who initiated the first meeting of West African students in London. Once established, though, the cohort of students that helped found WASU quickly developed their own vision of a united West African nation and national identity. Less than one year after its founding, WASU members were publishing a club magazine, involving themselves in colonial and international issues, sending WASU delegates to conferences, and planning the establishment of the first African hostel in London.¹

¹ For secondary material on the West African Students' Union see: Philip Garigue, "The West African Students' Union: A Study in Culture Contact," *Africa Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures* 23, 1 (1953): 55-69; G. O. Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union and the Politics of Decolonisation, 1925-1958* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1982); Hakim Adi, "West African Students in Britain, 1900-1960: The Politics of Exile," in *Africans in Britain*, ed. David Killingray, (London: Frank Cass, 1994), 107-129; Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and*

WASU's efforts to create a united West African nation were not confined to London. As WASU members graduated and returned to their home countries in West Africa at the end of the 1920s and through the 1930s, they continued to develop WASU's political vision for a united West African nation in the colonies by founding WASU branches and celebrating "WASU Day," and, more critically, by actively facilitating the formation of a visible, educated West African citizenry ("West African public opinion") in the colonial cities through newspapers and clubs. In this way, the students introduced a West African public sphere in London and British West Africa that enabled them to negotiate their political status and position within the colonial cities of British West Africa, the British Empire, and international networks and organizations.

In many ways this dissertation is "a tale of two cities," a history of these students' political and cultural productions as they developed in London, the governing city of a grand empire, and Accra, the administrative capital of the British Gold Coast. The Time-frame, 1925-1935, captures a key period in West African students' political and cultural experimentation within metropolitan, colonial, imperial, and international spaces. It opens at the height of post-war imperial reforms that included the gradual transformation of the "white dominions" from self-governing colonies to nearly independent nations within the Empire. It was a time, as well, of intense debate over India's position within the Empire, whether as a self-governing colony or as an independent nation similar to the "white" dominion governments.² India had even been permitted to join the League of Nations alongside Britain and the dominions. International coalitions, including student

Communism (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998); and, Philip Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

² Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 27-29.

movements for peace, black international, and anti-colonial and women's organizations, empowered by post-war discourse on national self-determination, were arguing more vigorously than before the war for an end to colonialism and for racial and gender diversity within international political structures. Indeed, as Mrinalini Sinha suggests, this was a "transitional moment" in the history of the British Empire and internationalism, as we shall see, it was also an important period in the history of British West Africa.³

The economic prosperity of the 1920s had a critical impact on the economy and population of the colonial cities of British West Africa. The cocoa boom of the 1920s in the Gold Coast led to the building of new roads, railways, and schools, and the expansion of government offices and European firms in Accra. Thus, the Accra to which students returned to at the end of the decade had altered drastically. A significant number of newly-literate young men from nearby villages had joined the English-literate group of Accra. They were well-established and poised to contribute to political and literary debates in the press and clubs in ways that did not always accommodate WASU students' vision for a new nation.

³ *Specters of Mother India*, 26-42. Elleke Boehmer documents the various connections and sharing of political strategies that took place within the anti-colonial networks of the late 19th century. Brent Edwards and Michele Stephens investigate similar formations among black international travelers during the interwar period, and Leila Rupp, Mrinalini Sinha, Antoinette Burton, Angela Woollacott, and many other scholars investigate the formation of international and imperial feminist networks. Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Woollacott, Angela. *Gender and Empire*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006; and Woollacott, Angela. *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. More recently, scholars including Fiona Paisley and Corinne Pernet have begun to document south-south connections formed between women in non-western cities. Fiona Paisley, *Cultivating Modernity: Culture and Internationalism in Feminism's Pacific Age*, *Journal of Women's History* 14, 3 (Autumn, 2002), 105-132; Corinne A. Pernet, "Chilean Feminists, the International Women's Movement, and Suffrage, 1915-1950," *The Pacific Historical Review* 69, 4, *Woman Suffrage: The View from the Pacific* (Nov., 2000), 663-688.

This study ends prior to the Second Italo-Abyssinian War in 1935; shortly before the arrival of a new cohort of university-educated Africans in Accra, namely University of Pennsylvania graduate Nnamdi Azikiwe, and former editor of the *Negro Worker* and student of the People's University of the East, Sierra Leonean I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson. Azikiwe and Wallace-Johnson brought their unique experiences and perspectives to the West African public sphere of Accra. Their involvement in local politics marked a change in the kinds of political projects that formed within this public sphere after 1935. The Second Italo-Abyssinian War marked a turning point for West Africans, prompting them to re-evaluate of the possibility of their finding a political future as a self-governing nation within the British Empire and within the international political structures of that emerged during the interwar period.

Between 1925 and 1935, West African student travelers' political and cultural projects formed not only in relation to Great Britain and European colonizing discourses, but were the product of many discourses and experiences, some of which emanated from within the British Empire and others from international organizations. Not surprisingly, their multiply-influenced political and cultural projects were not limited to combating colonialism and colonial constructions of Africa, though these were inherent to all of their endeavors; rather, their primary objective was the formation of a self-governing nation that would enable them to join the British Commonwealth and actively participant in international affairs.

The students' proposal for a united West African nation was based on other models of political structures, particularly dominion proposals for nationhood and a British commonwealth. Owing to the tendency to think of the nation as the nation-state

that formed after the Second World War, the term nation, as it was used by West African students during the 1920s and 1930s, requires further explanation. This cohort of students imagined a united West African nation structured as a commonwealth of nations—a political coalition among four independent countries: Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Nigeria, and the Gold Coast. Similar to the relationship that developed between the dominion countries and the British government, each of the four countries that made up their vision for a united West African nation would be autonomous, but would share common legal codes and West African nationality. The united West African nation that they envisioned, itself modeled after the commonwealth, would then voluntarily join a British commonwealth of nations as an independent unit.

It is important to note that West African students' vision for a united nation did not necessarily conflict with models of imperialism as re-imagined by dominion nationalists and liberal-minded imperialists during the Edwardian and interwar period. As Ian Fletcher has argued, nationalism and imperialism often, though not always, fit comfortably together such that dominion nationalism was able to develop within the British imperial structure.⁴ During the 1920s, both dominion and West African nationalist projects sought to promote nationhood within the Empire. Both groups envisioned a commonwealth model that would enable the formation of independent nations (that included Great Britain) pursuing a set of shared political and economic goals alongside separate nationalist agendas. WASU's vision for a united West African nation went one step further, suggesting a layering of nations and commonwealths, that is, a

⁴ Fletcher, Ian Christopher, "Double Meanings: Nation and Empire in the Edwardian Era," in *After the Imperial Turn, Thinking With and Through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 246-259.

united West African commonwealth of nations within a British commonwealth of nations.

As this cohort of students made their journey from British West Africa to London and back again, they were drawn into new and interlocking institutional geographies. Their traveling between London and Accra affected their engagement with imperial, international, and domestic structures. Living and studying in London brought them into contact with ideas and people from all parts of the British Empire—the dominions and crown colonies, along with a diversity of international groups. They learned to found social clubs and newspapers, attend political meetings, correspond with youth groups throughout the world, and invite members of parliament and of the colonial office to meet with them. They became operators within an imperial and international world. When they returned to Accra, they entered into still another geography that revolved around relations between images of an urban Accra and a rural African village. From the perspective of the educated elites, urban Accra was a “modern” space, connected to the imperial and international world of London, the site of African-owned newspapers and clubs, European fashions, monogamous marriages, and western-educated men and women. Western-educated African elite, like British administrators, saw the African village as a space of tradition, illiteracy, ethnicity, tribalism, and polygamy. In the newspapers and clubs of Accra, the western-educated group negotiated the relationship between images of urban and rural, and traditional and modern Africa through their engagement with domestic politics, domestic in terms of West Africa, and domestic in terms of the family and home. Their domestic politics focused on “modernizing” all sections of Accra’s English-literate group. Elite newspapers dispensed advice to

middling readers on sexuality, marriage, family life, and gender all designed to make West Africans appear “modern” in the eyes of British and European observers. Thus, the imperial politics that the students developed in London served as a bridge between the institutional geographies of London-Accra and the institutional geographies of urban Accra-African village.

Scholars such as Edward Said and Benita Parry have discussed the “overlapping” geographies and “intertwined” histories that grew out of colonialism and imperialism; however, their focus has been on the fusions that formed during the post-colonial period.⁵ This fusion of place, the weaving together of London and Accra, was an imperial and international project that involved European and African travelers. West African student travelers used the imperial and international institutions of the social club, the international press, and imperial discourses to bridge the geographical and ideological gaps between metropole and colony, and to locate a politically and culturally autonomous position for Africa within the wider field of empire and internationalism.

Recent scholarship, especially the work of Brent Edwards and Elleke Boehmer, has emphasized the ways that metropolitan cities functioned as critical “meeting grounds” for colonized groups.⁶ Boehmer describes London between 1890 and 1920 as a

⁵ Benita Parry, “Overlapping Territories and Intertwined Histories: Edward Said’s Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism,” in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 24.

⁶ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 3-5 and Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also, Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1987); Gretchen Gerzina, *Black London: Life before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Laura Tabili, “*We Ask for British Justice*”: *Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994); Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Brent H. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880-1930* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial*

city “pullulating with secularist, anarchist, socialist, avant-garde, and freethinking circles... thus formed an important meeting ground for the Indian, Irish, African, and Caribbean freedom movements.”⁷ While Boehmer’s work focuses on the borrowing and sharing of political strategies that took place among different groups within the British Empire, Edwards draws attention to the international dimensions of imperial cities during the interwar period. West African students were influenced by both imperial and international discourses and groups. They borrowed ideas from dominion nationalists, Indian nationalists, anti-colonialists, and anti-imperialists, and were also deeply influenced by the activities of African Americans and international discourse on national self-determination. As a consequence of their experiences in London, West African students developed new ways of thinking about themselves and their political situation in relation to one another, and in their engagement with previous generations of African students, other colonial students, African Americans, imperial reformers, dominion nationalists, and internationalists.

Accra, the capital city of the Gold Coast Colony, provided a fertile site for West African students to bring their new cosmopolitan and international vision home to Anglophone West Africa. Unlike the neighboring town of Cape Coast, for example, where the Fante ethnic group played a significant role in local politics, Accra did not have a single ethnic group that controlled educated Africans’ involvement in local

Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); James E. Genova, “The Empire Within: The Colonial Popular Front in France, 1934-1938,” *Alternatives*, 26 (2006), 175-209.

⁷ Owing to the pan-African conferences that took place in London and the strength of the connections made between African American intellectuals and people of African descent in London during the twentieth century, I would add African Americans to Boehmer’s list of political groups in London. Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial*, 20.

affairs.⁸ The Ga were the indigenous ethnic group of Accra, and held tremendous power over the sections of the city near the sea, though most Ga chiefs did not involve themselves in town/colonial politics and the “urban” world of Accra in the same way as the educated elite, Gold Coast lawyers and newspaper owners did.⁹ This political situation opened the educated group of Accra to political opportunities that were not available in Cape Coast or in the other colonial cities of British West Africa. Accra was also a railway and transportation hub, facilitating the movement of natural resources from the interior to the port, and as critically the migration of Africans from the interior to the city. Thus, the city offered numerous employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers, attracting people from around the globe to study, work, govern, and proselytize.

During the interwar period, Accra’s population consisted of Nigerians, Sierra Leoneans, West Indians, Indians, Lebanese, Europeans, and Americans. Accra’s African-owned newspapers reported on events occurring throughout the world, and

⁸ As historian Roger Gocking explains, in Cape Coast “traditional culture maintained a powerful influence that became even more pronounced, especially when the hopes that these Euro-Africans [the ‘Anglo-Fanti’ satirized by Kobina Sekyi in *The Blinkards*] had for recognition as equals within the colonial world collapsed at the turn of the twentieth century.” At the turn of the century Cape Coast experienced an economic boom from mining and logging industries. The boom was soon followed by a serious decline in the city’s population. In 1901 it had a population of 28,948, and in 1911 the population was 11,269. As the drop in population indicates, Cape Coast was losing its economic edge in the early twentieth century. Indeed, shipping activity had decreased and many western-educated Africans and European firms moved to Accra and Sekondi for economic reasons. Roger Gocking, *Facing Two Ways: Ghana's Coastal Communities Under Colonial Rule* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1999), 9, 130.

⁹ The Ga people were the indigenous ethnic group of Accra, and for centuries had controlled the land near the sea and the trade in fish and seafood. The Ga people had their own religious ceremonies and practices that tended to conflict with those associated with Europeans, Christian missionaries, and Christian Africans. Throughout the colonial period they were focused on maintaining their authority over Osu, Ussher Town and James Town. This is not to suggest that the Ga did not interact with colonial authorities and European merchants or have an impact on colonial, European, and municipal affairs. Rather it is to say that a deep investment in colonial and municipal politics was not their primary objective. They had a strong community and chieftaincy that they worked to maintain. The Ga were more insular than the Fante. They were less likely to send their children abroad for higher education. If any group was dominate in Accra town politics and colonial bureaucracy it was the Akan (which encompassed several ethnic groups from the surrounding area). Participation in town politics required some education (formal or informal) in English language and administrative culture. The majority of western-educated African residents of Accra were from the Akan ethnic group, a category that encompassed several different ethnic groups, including the Fante.

carried special sections devoted to Empire news. Accra's diverse population and its West African public sphere defined it as a cosmopolitan colonial city with imperial and international connections. Wealth from the cocoa industry had led to the development of a new group of educated Africans who had originally left their home communities to attend a local boys' school and following this traveled to Accra to work as teaching assistants, office clerks, police officers, and shop keepers. These men founded a number of social, literary and debating clubs and used these spaces to hold their own political and social debates. Thus, the educated group in Accra was extremely diverse composed of both foreign-educated cosmopolitan elites and locally-educated youth. The foreign-educated elite, who ran Accra's newspapers and social clubs, consciously avoided calling attention to the ethnic and religious differences within the educated group. They promoted inclusive and unifying identities that captured a wider cross-section of Accra's diverse English-literate residents. Accra also experienced an increase in the flow of people and products from Atlantic and imperial trading networks, and became a popular destination for university-educated students from the other colonies.

The urban environment of Accra for western-educated West Africans was similar to the environment in London in that members of the educated group came from a variety of places and had different ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds. As with the West African students in London, the western-educated residents of Accra had to find points of connection and commonality beyond ethnic or religious ties (though many did identify along these lines) to encompass a diverse group of actors. They did so by actively working to constitute a modern, forward-looking West African public sphere.

West African Public Sphere

My understanding of the public sphere derives from Habermas's notion of the public sphere as constellation of public institutions (daily newspapers, journals, clubs, bars, cinemas, and coffeehouses) that formed a space of political and cultural engagement, free from government intervention, but capable of staging public debate. I see "the public sphere" as a theoretical space where divergent members of West African educated classes interacted, challenging one another's political assumptions and social perspectives, responding to and seeking to influence governmental decision-making. I have chosen to use the concept of the public sphere over other concepts such as networks, webs, or spaces because it reflects the self-conscious political and cultural character and intention of these interactive institutions for western-educated West Africans.

The West African public sphere, as it took form both in England and West Africa during the interwar period, emerged out of a series of confrontations between politically-ambitious educated West African elite and colonial structures of indirect rule that had pushed the elite further onto the sidelines of government. The public sphere provided an arena outside the colonial government and African chieftaincy for West Africans from different ethnic, religious, educational, and economic backgrounds to engage in public discussion and to form a West African public opinion that could exert pressure on colonial, imperial, and international political structures. While African newspapers and clubs existed before the First World War, the West African public sphere that I focus on in this dissertation was a product of a particular set of circumstances and can be traced to shifts in colonial governmental structure and policy in West Africa, conceptualizations of

political power at the imperial and international level, and changing demographics of English-literate West Africans after the First World War.

Within their newly emerging West African public sphere, West Africans developed a political arena that allowed them to participate in an internal dialogue on political and cultural concepts, and to attempt to constitute an Anglophone West African public opinion within international, British imperial, and colonial and anti-colonial public spheres of the interwar period. Using newspapers and political and social clubs, both elite and locally-educated West Africans were able to voice their opinions on issues relevant to their immediate and future political status within the British Empire, colonial cities of British West Africa, and international communities (from international youth movements for peace to the League of Nations). The West African political arena that they created in this way was the product of those classic instruments and institutions of the modern public sphere (and nations and empires), namely clubs (political, social, literary and academic) and newspapers.¹⁰

Owing to the fact that few Africans could afford to study abroad, the West African public sphere as it took form in London was exclusive and included mainly men from privileged backgrounds from the West African colonies (as opposed to the protectorate territories). The vision that these men created—a united West African nation—was inclusive of different ethnic groups and religions, but was homogenous in terms of gender and class. The public sphere of Accra was more diverse in terms of class. At its core in the 1930s was the popular urban press that, while controlled by the

¹⁰ See Jurgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” *New German Critique* 1, 3 (Fall 1974), 49-55; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); and, Paul Rich, *Elixir of Empire: The English Public Schools, Ritualism, Freemasonry and Imperialism* (London: Regency Press, 1989).

educated African elite, was designed to facilitate interaction between the different sections of Accra's educated group, foreign- and locally-educated Africans. The educated elite strategically used the popular press to encourage middling readers' participation in public debate. Literary and debating clubs were also mixed in terms of social class, though some clubs were more exclusive than others.

Gender diversity, however, remained a problem in both cities. Between 1925 and 1935, only a handful of women actively participated in the West African public spheres of London and Accra. Women's near absence from this domain was a source of constant discussion and concern for the educated elite, especially in Accra. In response, the Accra-based and African-owned *West Africa Times* invented an educated African woman columnist in 1931 for the purpose of stimulating women's entrance into this world. The educated elites' encouragement of women's and non-elite men's participation in the press was in part a reaction to colonialism. In order to prove their capacity for self-rule, the educated elite of Accra in the early 1930s worked tirelessly to foster diversity in both class and gender within the public sphere, even when this involved their creating the appearance of a more diverse public sphere than it actually was.

The West African public sphere served many purposes. It showcased West Africa's educated urban citizenry or "public opinion" as evidence of West Africans' capacity for self-government. It was also a critical arena for political and cultural production among West Africans. It was the site of an internal conversation between differently situated English-literate West Africans about nationhood, national identity and culture. In this space they discussed and negotiated important concerns over the meaning of modernity, education, national structures, and the foundation and reproduction of those

structures—the couple and the family. The public sphere was also critical to their engagement with issues outside their group, and to their interactions with British administrators, African chiefs, and imperial and international discourses.

The West African Students' Union club magazine helped to develop a West African presence in London and the international world, as did the Union's habit of sending delegates to international and imperial conferences to speak on behalf of "West Africa." WASU's founding of the African-funded hostel in central London was celebrated as physical evidence of a West African presence within the Empire, and viewed as a way into discussions taking place within this space. Collectively, these activities helped to form a West African presence in the Empire that was not created by European merchants or British imperialists, but was the product of the West African students and their founding a West African public sphere in the metropole that enabled them to build political projects and cultural outside the confines of the colonial structure. WASU marks a particular moment in the history of Anglophone West African nationalism, that is, the creation of a West African identity that would be inhabited by these students and other educated groups, and at the center of this identity, the image of a self-governing nation that would stand next to Britain as an independent actor in world affairs.

In Accra, after the founding of the new urban press in the early 1930s, the public sphere diversified, becoming a space of intense dialogue between differently situated readers and writers, but also a way for elite Africans to assert their influence by showing British audiences (through the new press) an emergent group of engaged citizens that would form the core of a future West African nation. In both cities, the West African

public sphere functioned as an extra-colonial sphere of influence, politics, and cultural production. In London, the students used WASU to work with the Colonial Office to change educational policies in West Africa. In Accra, newspapers owners and members of the elite African Rodger Club used the press and club to co-operate with the colonial government on a range of issues, from salaries for clerks to greater representation for educated Africans on the colony's Legislative Council. Chapters 2 and 3 consider how public institutions established by African students in London facilitated students' practice of "imperial citizenship" and provided them with access to discourses on "modern" government. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the ways that the West African public sphere of Accra formed the local identities, particularly class identity.

Imperial Citizenship

The many challenges that globalization has posed to nation-based citizenship has caused scholars of the contemporary period to revise their understanding of citizenship from citizenship as tied to a governmental structure to citizenship as claim-making practices that formal citizens and non-citizens use to gain access to communal resources and to lobby for legal rights within a governmental structure. In an effort to understand the complex political situation of guest workers, migrant populations, refugees, and international workers, for example, some scholars have called for a new understanding of citizenship as "post-" or as "trans- national." Yasemin Soysal and Saskia Sassen have both argued that people inhabiting trans-national positions have come to invent new positions from which to exercise rights and to participate in their chosen communities.

From this perspective, the examination of the citizenship practices and strategies of West Africans in London, particularly West Africans who did not have official status as British subjects, yields a wealth of information about how different groups developed alternative forms of citizenship at different points in time and under various circumstances.

This more fluid definition of citizenship also takes the focus off nations and empires as the inventors and guarantors of citizenship and allows for the consideration of the creative forms of “citizenship” practiced by marginalized groups, or by people without formal status or rights.¹¹ During the interwar period a person born within the British Empire could be classified as a British Subject, a British protected person, or a Commonwealth citizen.¹² The four countries in British West Africa were divided between a colonial area (usually near the coast) and protectorate areas. West Africans born in the colonial areas were British subjects. Their status as British subjects gave them the right to travel throughout the United Kingdom without a visa. West Africans born in the protectorate areas were British protected persons and could not travel to the U.K. without a visa. Most students who studied abroad were British subjects, though their status as British subjects did not entitle them to the same rights as British subjects

¹¹ While British West Africans born in the colonial areas were considered British subjects, this did not necessarily mean that they had access to the same rights and “citizenship codes” as “natural born” British subjects (people born in the U.K. and the dominions). The difference between citizenship-as-status versus citizenship-as-rights is often overlooked by the literature on British immigration policy. Karatani alerts us to the stratified and uneven character of the British subject. He writes, “In the case of naturalization up to 1914, holding the same citizenship-as-status did not necessarily guarantee its holders the same citizenship-as-right and as-desirable activity. Also, holding the same citizenship-as-status did not mean that the holders belonged to the same ethno-cultural group. Nor did it imply that they shared a sense of attachment. It was not expected by the imperial government that farm workers in Jamaica should identify themselves with bankers in London.” Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 53.

¹² Between 1914 to 1948, “British subject” was the legal term used for people born in the United Kingdom, the dominions, and colonies. The term “British protected person” applied to people born within the British protectorates. The British Nationality Act of 1948 replaced “British subject” with the term “Commonwealth Citizen.” Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship. Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 53.

born in the U.K. or the dominions. As discussed in Chapter 3, West African British subjects and protected persons had to find channels outside, yet connected to governmental structures that allowed them to participate in public debate and lobby for resources and rights. In this case, West Africans used their ambiguous status as colonial and protectorate subjects to their advantage.

Scholarship on the claim-making practices of migrant populations has shown that the definition of citizenship-as-status limits the claim-making (citizenship) practices of migrant groups. Soysal argues that the legal and institutional distinction between citizens and aliens is ambiguous. Using a number of cases from the contemporary period, she charts the ways that non-citizen residents have found access to rights reserved for citizens through their use of governmental and non-governmental institutions.¹³ Sassen has made a similar claim, suggesting that the narrow definition of citizenship as a relationship always and only tied to a governmental structure or national state has limited scholarly examination of more informal citizenship practices engaged in by people with and without citizenship status.¹⁴ By approaching citizenship as a practice, we can begin to see how a group like British West African students who were both excluded and included in governmental structures created alternative claim-making positions from which to seek resources and rights.

¹³ Yasemin Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).

¹⁴ For an example of a definition of citizenship as the relationship between governments and people, see Charles Tilly, "A Primer on Citizenship." *Theory and Society* 26, 4, Special Issue of Recasting Citizenship (August, 1997), 599. Saskia Sassen, "The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics." *The New Centennial Review* 3, 2 (2003): 41-66; Michael Hanagan, "Recasting Citizenship: Introduction." *Theory and Society* 26, 4, Special Issue of Recasting Citizenship (August, 1997): 397-402; and Frederick Cooper's introduction to *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2005).

The most important claim-making resource for this group was the West African public sphere. By the time WASU was established, colonial students and people of African descent had already founded a number of student clubs in London that they used in much the same way that working-class Victorians used clubs and press networks as instruments of “self-culture” and “self-improvement.” West Africans focus, however, was less on individual improvement and far more on collective “uplift.” Still the parallels are important. As Anne Rodrick explains, working class men and women of Victorian Birmingham used instruments of self-improvement to pursue “an active and carefully defined citizenship.”¹⁵ West African Students were probably inspired by this earlier use of the club, and also by the ways that other colonial students, European women, and African Americans used clubs, newspapers, and the discourses of self-improvement. They adopted the concept of self-help as part of their club motto, and saw its practice as a critical component of their achieving self-government for (Anglophone) West Africa. The language of self-improvement and self-help helped to deflect critiques from colonial authorities. It was much more politically questionable for British administrators to openly prevent West Africans from participating in self-help and self-improvement efforts than it would have been to charge them with sedition or political organization against the government. These educated West Africans used the rhetoric of self-help and self-improvement to resist colonial oversight, while, at the same time, building an autonomous (yet interactive) political space and role for themselves within the colonial structure.

¹⁵ Anne B. Rodrick, *Self-Help and Civic Culture: Citizenship in Victorian Birmingham*, (Burlington, VT.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 45.

Within the imperial world of London, they engaged in citizenship practices, intervening in political and economic issues affecting Africa as self-proclaimed representatives of West African public opinion, and by using the British press to establish their authority to speak on behalf of the region and continent, and, in the process, issuing alternative representations and counter-arguments about Africa through letters, announcements, and articles. Other acts of citizenship involved sending resolutions to the Colonial Office on a range of issues affecting African students in London and political and economic issues in Africa. They also called public meetings with Members of Parliament and colonial officials, and hosted public lectures meant to “educate” the “British public” on Africa, and to promote their vision of the future political status of their home countries. They painstakingly published every scrap of written correspondence between WASU and the Colonial Office, from the most prosaic letters offering Christmas greetings to requests (and denials) of funds in support of their hostel and club activities. WASU sent delegates to international, colonial, and imperial conferences where they were asked to represent Anglophone West Africa, and in some cases, provide speeches on their home countries. Less formal acts of citizenship included their hosting dinners and dances on behalf of honorary guests of African descent, and an annual celebration of West African nationalism in London (and in British West Africa) that they called “WASU Day.” This event was well-attended and included Europeans, Africans, and people of African descent.

In Accra, they continued to engage these kinds of citizenship practices. They used the new urban press to build the appearance of a significant and engaged group of “West African” readers and writers, the future citizens of a future self-governing West

Africa. Instrumental to their showcasing these young citizens was the practice of publishing readers' letters that expressed a diversity of opinions, facilitating (and sometimes staging) public debate over "modern" social problems, and developing strong fictional newspaper personas to prominently articulate an educated elite opinion. Moreover, the habit of pseudonyms and anonymously-authored articles in the press allowed these newspapers (that often had a staff of two or three people) to appear as much larger enterprises than they actually were. This, in turn, enhanced their visibility as a claim-making group of educated Africans. Similar to WASU, the educated elite of Accra used their social club, the Rodger Club, to hold meetings with the Governor of the Gold Coast and other British officials about issues that affected the city's population, such as government hiring practices, municipal affairs, and African representation on town councils and the Legislative Council. Newspaper editorials offered detailed accounts of these meetings, and in dialogue with other sections of the newspapers, provided commentary on political and social concerns, and proposed solutions and outlined future topics of discussion and debate within the West African public sphere, among readers and writers, and between the educated elite and the colonial government.

Through their engagement with the local newspapers, clubs, school boards, and town politics, and through their following and commenting on imperial and international concerns in within the public sphere, educated Africans performed "modern" citizenship. The formal and informal activities that they pursued within the West African public sphere in London and Accra, irrespective of their colonial or imperial legal status or ethnic group, illustrate how this colonized group of educated Africans (whose status was particularly ambiguous at this time and in these cities) brilliantly navigated colonial,

imperial, African, and international structures to develop a set of practices that allowed them to actively participate in and re-shape these structures and re-define their position within and between them.

Modernity

For West Africans who moved to London for higher education during the interwar period, this process involved leaving their home communities and settling in new environments free of former attachments and having to find new types of affiliations and kinship. In London, they established a West African identity, and used the West African public sphere to negotiate the meaning of West Africa and their relationship to one another. In Accra, the process took place within similar, though more diverse institutions, and the focus was on establishing new patterns of relationships between men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children, elder and junior people, and educated and uneducated Africans. The educated group's discussion of these relationships demanded their changing various ethnically inscribed patterns that transferred them from multiple ethnic cultures to a more singular national culture. The educated elite sometimes referred to the creation of national culture, or a standard set of cultural practices, as "social progress," and as part of the creation of a "new age" in Anglophone West Africa.

The meaning of modernity for this group derived from their engagement with imperial and international discussions. For them, "modern" meant participation in those discussions as West Africans, and not as members of ethnic groups or colonies. The nation they imagined in London was modeled on nations that were part of the League of

Nations, particularly the dominion nations, Britain and the United States. I use the term modern the way that it was used by the educated elite, as a sign-post to differentiate between the nation that educated elites' imagined and other possible political formations that were in circulation at this time and against which elites were positioning their own nation—such as a nation based on ethnic affiliations and African chieftaincies—an example—a Fante nation governed by Fante chiefs.

Gender and a United West African Nation

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, within the urban and cosmopolitan environments of Accra and London gender became absolutely critical to the educated group's identity as modern Africans. The modern nation the educated elite pursued in both cities was structured around a “western” monogamous married couple and nuclear family. Therefore, this group needed educated women, or at least a prominent representation of educated womanhood in their public sphere. Colonial educational policy had favored men, and missionary and colonial efforts to educate women focused on domesticity and childrearing, and did not imagine women as part of the “modern” public sphere, engaging in social reform. This resulted in a large population of locally-educated men, without equally educated wives. Throughout the colonial period, the numbers of educated women remained low. The only representations of educated womanhood in the city were a few very elite women whose educational experiences were far more advanced than the locally-educated group. Many had studied abroad and had degrees in higher education.

Consequently, a new kind of educated woman had to be invented. As will be discussed at length in Chapter 6, in 1931, African writers for the *West Africa Times* (established by former WASU president J. B. Danquah) created “Marjorie Mensah.” “Marjorie Mensah” was not a cookie-cutter reproduction of British discourse, but the product of intense debate within the pages of the *Times* and other local papers. The *Time’s* proposal for a new image of educated African womanhood through “Marjorie” was in keeping with their vision of the nation. Through their discussion of women and their role in society, they also engaged in a discussion about how to find a single marriage practice—a standardized national law around marriage rather than sanctioning two different forms of marriage (colonial ordinance and customary marriages). This debate led to the larger question of the place of educated women in society and, in determining that, the educated elite were essentially working out what kinds of relationships would be the foundation of their vision of the nation—relationships between men (Chapter 5), and relationships between women and men, focusing on the development of standard gender norms and the establishment of monogamous marriages sanctioned by a standard national legal code. The elites preferred national legal codes over customary law, and argued that customary law on the issue of marriage was too fragmented to serve as the foundation of the new nation that they envisioned. The opinions of the locally-educated group were mixed. In many ways customary marriage served their interests as did the possibility of having two different marriage systems in operation in the colony. They were not convinced that a “modern” Africa had to necessarily abandon customary marriages.

I want to end my discussion by highlighting what I see as an important contribution to the study of colonial identity formation and to the history of West African nationalism. Throughout this thesis I emphasize the creative inventiveness of western-educated West Africans' identity formation—particularly focusing on their borrowing from a variety of resources that included colonial, as well as international and imperial discourses. In each chapter of this dissertation, I focus on the ways that western-educated West Africans borrowed, adapted, and combined these resources to invent a “modern” West African nation and West African identity that could not be reduced to the Great Britain or the “west.” Whether in London or Accra, western-educated West Africans' efforts to decolonize African identity and culture was essential to their history—a history that was itself marked by the desire to create autonomous spaces of cultural and political production for Africans that were separate from colonial political structures.

Chapter 2

Students, Citizenship, Nationhood and a West African Public Sphere in London

Only a few years had passed since Britain's first imperial army had gone to war against Germany and its allies—"450 million subjects of the Crown" bound by a "single declaration of the King."¹⁶ The war propaganda brimmed with phrases such as "Sons of Empire," and "Bonds Across the Sea." It featured cartoons of "Britannia attended by her statesmen, her young men of the frontiers, or her familiar imperial menagerie—lion, tiger, emu, springbok, kangaroo and beaver."¹⁷ Yet, after the 1916 conscription, "the war to end all wars" had lost much of its popular appeal. It lasted much longer than the British government or anyone had anticipated and left Great Britain more than ever before financially dependent on its colonial economy. While Britain emerged from the war with a large number of new territorial acquisitions, it was forced to make certain concessions in India and the dominions.¹⁸ At the same time, Britain was facing "world"

¹⁶ James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 158.

¹⁷ James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 158-9.

¹⁸ Though many of its "mandate territories" turned out to be "more trouble than they were worth." The administering countries were accountable to the League of Nations and had to submit annual reports to the League (though most territories did not require reports). The goals of the League were unclear, the only guidelines offered to the administering countries was that they ensured the "well-being and the development of such peoples [in the former colonies of Germany and the Ottoman Empire] from a sacred trust of civilization." Karatani suggests that the mandate system was potentially imperial expansion under a different name. Bernard Porter makes a similar argument. Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth, and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 109-10; Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 243-5.

pressure to conform to the ideals of a post-war internationalism that emphasized peace and co-operation between nations and validated the belief long argued by people of African descent, dominion nationalist, anti-colonialists, anti-imperialists, and socialists—that is, the “natural” right of any “civilized” group to strive unencumbered towards its nationhood and ultimately achieve national self-determination.¹⁹

The post-war British Empire was rich with economic and political possibilities. Imperialists were as divided as they were before the war. Old-style imperialists supported the traditional nineteenth-century imperial model of universal free trade while others argued for the creation of “tariff walls against the world outside” with “absolute freedom of commerce among all its constituent parts” that would protect the Empire from foreign competition.²⁰ “Progressive” imperialists suggested reforms along the lines of a commonwealth system. The white self-governing dominion governments and the non-white colonial “dependencies,” namely India, continued to voice their own visions about the future, as they had before the war, but with greater authority than in previous decades

¹⁹ See H. G. Wells, “The Idea of a League of Nations,” *Atlantic Monthly* (January and February 1919, parts I and II); Woodrow Wilson, “The Covenant of the League of Nations,” originally drafted February 14, 1919 (www.firstworldwar.com); Woodrow Wilson, “One of President Woodrow Wilson’s Final Addresses in Support of the League of Nations,” September 25, 1919, Pueblo, Colorado (www.firstworldwar.com); Andrea Bosco and Alex May, *The Round Table, the Empire/Commonwealth, and British Foreign Policy* (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1997); Walter Nimocks, *Milner’s Young Men: the Kindergarten in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968); Alfred Milner, *Questions of the Hour* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1925); and Alfred Milner, *The Nation and the Empire Being a Collection of Speeches and Addresses* (London: Constable, 1913).

²⁰ Lord Beaverbrook was one of the most vocal supporters of Empire free trade. He also owned a large percentage of the conservative press in Britain. Most conservatives were still in favor of the policy of universal free trade that had made many Britons rich during the Victorian period. Beaverbrook’s plan, while it went against the previous policy that had brought Britain economic success, was “very persuasive.” It argued to restore prosperity to Britain and infuse the Empire with “new meaning, and perhaps make of it at last the economic super-Power Joe Chamberlain had imagined.” Beaverbrook formed his own political party called the United Empire Party and “plugged his theme incessantly, until the phrase Empire Free Trade, if not its meaning was familiar in every British household,” and the “impish face of the millionaire” became the “face of contemporary imperialism.” His plan was never realized, but in 1932, some imperial trade preferences were implemented in relation to the commonwealth countries. Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 314-5.

owing to their contribution to the war and the uncertainty surrounding the imperial project at this time. While the dominions worried that “Empire Free Trade” would strengthen imperial centralization and were generally against the plan, they were much more interested in pursuing independence within the Empire. By 1920, they were standing side by side with Britain as a member of the League of Nations.²¹ Their project for independence within the imperial framework that began in the late nineteenth century saw tremendous progress after the Imperial War Conference of 1917. The Belfour Declaration (established at the Imperial Conference of 1926) acknowledged the dominions as equal to the United Kingdom and invested them with control over their constitutions and nationality laws.²²

As the white dominion governments were gaining greater autonomy within the Empire, India was still lobbying for its independence in exchange for services rendered during the war. Some concessions had been granted, notably the Government of India Act of 1919; however, the Act was a very long way from even the most moderate of the nationalists’ goals. In 1920, India found independent recognition within the international arena, and, along with the British dominions, joined the League of Nations. India’s entry into the League as a non self-governing member embodied the fundamental tension between imperial and international projects at this time. Its presence was a “conspicuous contradiction,” an opportunity for colonial subjects and people of color to ask: how might people excluded from nations and prevented from pursuing “national self-determination”

²¹ By 1920, as the dominion governments stood next to Britain as independent members of the League of Nations, their efforts over the previous three decades and their participation in the war had yielded favorable results. The “dependencies,” despite their own arguments for independence and their contributions to the war saw little or no change in their political statuses.

²² Though additional meetings would follow and the specifics of the relationship between the dominions and the United Kingdom would be adjusted and revised at later conferences, this marked a critical point in dominion autonomy.

join and participate in international structures (that were dominated by empires and nations)?²³

In 1918, W. E. B. Du Bois saw the uncertainty after the war as the perfect opportunity “to impress upon the members of the Peace Conference sitting at Versailles the importance of Africa in the future world.”²⁴ The new internationalism after the war that saw the formation of an independent international political body in the form of the League of Nations and the rise of the idea of national self-determination inspired colonized people and people of color to argue for their inclusion in world affairs. In 1919 Gold Coast lawyer J. E. Casely Hayford founded the National Congress of British West Africa as means into the international arena, in this case as an independent nation within the British Empire that could, like India and the dominions, find representation separate from Britain within international politics.

The desire to be part of international affairs among colonized intellectuals and people of color was not new and had begun before the war. In 1911, Casely Hayford in his novel *Ethiopia Unbound* argued for Africa’s political and cultural autonomy from Britain.²⁵ During that same year, the First Race Congress met at the University of London. According to Du Bois, it was the largest gathering of different groups from around the globe to discuss ways of creating a future world free of wars and race prejudice.²⁶ Participants from West Africa included Edward Blyden, the Omani

²³ Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 28.

²⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa; An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York: Viking Press, 1947), 9.

²⁵ J. E. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound* (Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1969).

²⁶ Du Bois, *The World and Africa*, 4.

Amonoo V., and Gold Coast lawyer John Mensah Sarbah.²⁷ Du Bois speculated that the Congress' meeting, were it not interrupted by the First World War, might have been of "world significance."²⁸ Nevertheless, the Congress is evidence of the conversations that were taking place among colonized people and people of color before the war. These conversations allowed different groups to exchange of political and cultural strategies and form new alliances and networks.

The increasing popularity of internationalism in the form of leagues, clubs, conferences, and other political alliances after the First World War made the question of diversity and internationalism all the more pressing.²⁹ Among the colonized groups seeking to insert themselves into international networks and discussions were West African students in London. Before and after the war, West African students had attended pan-African and international conferences, and like many colonial students in London at this time period, were beginning to imagine in new ways their place in a world that was "in the making."³⁰

As internationalism, co-operation between nations and empires, and the idea of national self-determination were gaining political favor after the war, the Victorian era men of imperial industry, such as Cecil Rhodes, Lord Leverhulme, and Sir Alfred Jones were rapidly being replaced by the "truly imaginative men of Empire—the really striking characters, the people who could catch the imagination and fire the spirit" from among

²⁷ Spiller, *Papers on Inter-racial Problems*.

²⁸ Du Bois, *The World and Africa*, 4.

²⁹ The Universal Race Congress was attended by students, statesmen, and political leaders from around the world. The main focus of the meeting was to promote "inter-racial friendliness" and co-operation. Articles particularly relevant to the above are Louis P. Lochner, "The Cosmopolitan Club Movement," in *Papers on Inter-Racial Problems*, ed. Gustav Spiller (London: P. S. King & Son, 1911), 439-441; and Alfred H. Fried, "The Press as an Instrument of Peace," *Papers on Inter-Racial Problems*, ed. Gustav Spiller (London: P. S. King & Son, 1911), 420.

³⁰ Alain Locke, "Afro-Americans and West Africans," *Wasu* 8 (January 1929), 19.

Britain's subject peoples.³¹ Perhaps the most celebrated of these new "men" was Gandhi. Recently released from jail for "sedition" in 1924, his nationalist movement was coming into focus and gaining the attention of the international press. The League of the Nations and its support of national self-determination, co-operation, and peace after the war, left many colonized groups hopeful for the future and eager to participate in imperial reform.

In 1929, in a speech to the West African Students' Union in London, Alain Locke proclaimed this period a "time of revolution" and opportunity fueled by "the progressive and constructive trends of the new world order and of the internationalism upon which it [was] based."³² He told the students, "In the turmoil of the Great War and its after-math, the old order is disappearing; and this new world which is emerging from post-war confusion is our race's great hope and opportunity."³³ This was a moment of "opportunity" West Africans could not afford to lose. In the first issues of *Wasu* magazine, E. O. Asafu-Adjaye of Ashanti wrote,

This is a very opportune moment for facing the difficulty [of West African unity and progress], for there never was a stronger ferment of ideas amongst us than there is to-day. The various unions of African students are clear indications of this social fact. A new order is preparing to emerge out of the Chrysalis of the old. We have as such to 'strike the iron while it is hot.'³⁴

The cohort of West African students that studied in London during the interwar period was positioned to take advantage of the post-war discussions of internationalism, co-operation, national self-determination and imperial reform. In fact, these concepts became critical resources for the students as they developed their own political and

³¹ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 295.

³² Alain Locke, "Afro-Americans and West Africans," *Wasu* 8 (January 1929), 19.

³³ Alain Locke, "Afro-Americans and West Africans," *Wasu* 8 (January 1929), 19.

³⁴ E. O. Asafu-Adjaye, "Shall West Africa Co-operate?," *Wasu* 1 (March 1926), 10.

cultural project in 1925 marked by the founding of the West African Students' Union in London. Within the enabling confines of WASU, the students began to formulate an elaborate anti-colonial project based on their vision of a united West Africa as an independent nation within the British Empire. In constructing this vision, the students turned to a medley of different colonial and imperial political visions, and to international discourses and practices, their object being to disentangle Africa from its colonial relationship and identification with Britain. Locating their united West Africa within the broader framework of empire and internationalism, they challenged Britain's political and cultural authority. While they did not achieve independence from Britain during this period, I argue that their project was itself a decolonizing endeavor and an expression of their growing intellectual and cultural independence in a world context.

I begin my discussion of WASU one year before it was founded, focusing on the African student protest of the press coverage of the British Empire Exhibition held in London in 1924, especially of the West African section. Their protest marked the beginning of what would soon develop into a London-based student-led West African nationalist movement. Taking advantage of this "opportune" moment, students expanded their critique of the British press and representations of Africa in general, increasing their visibility in London and strengthening their position as "representatives" of Africa within the Empire.

Post-War Empire

Before beginning my discussion of African students in London, let me further develop the imperial context in which the students were working. After the First World War, imperialists worried that the war and the internationalist zeal that followed had seriously weakened imperial patriotism among Britons at all levels. Imperial settlements were losing their popular appeal.³⁵ Indeed, imperialism based on military might, one version of pre-war imperial imagery, became decidedly less acceptable after a war that had left Britain exhausted, bereft of so many promising young men and dubious about military engagement. Educationists revised pre-war imperial history, adding to it a “more ‘social’ or internationalist or ‘relativist’ slant”; anti-imperialists, as always, argued for the complete dismantling of the Empire, and the more moderate members of the Labour Party pushed for imperial reform along the lines of a commonwealth system and vocalized their concerns about race prejudice and the treatment of “‘native’” workers. Meanwhile, the “practical imperialists,” the people who “actually ran the empire,” mainly those associated with the Colonial Office in London, were busy making little or no effort to inform the British people about the Empire.³⁶ President Wilson’s discussion of national self-determination at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and the “new internationalism” associated with the founding of the League of Nations in 1920 did very little to encourage imperial patriotism.³⁷ It seemed obvious to those still committed to the Empire that something had to be done.

³⁵ “The Meaning of Wembley,” *Saturday Review*, April 26, 1924, 428.

³⁶ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 256, 263, 270-2.

³⁷ After President Wilson presented the principle of national self-determination in his Fourteen Points at the Paris conference, he agreed that the “application of the principle should be limited only to ‘the territories of defeated empire’ in order to reach a consensus among the participants of the peace conference.” Had he

Stepping up to the platform were several longtime imperialists including Lords Curzon and Milner and Leopold Amery who helped launch a number of government-sponsored campaigns to re-present the Empire to the British people and the international “community.”³⁸ They were joined by Lords Meath and Beaverbrook (chief proprietor of the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express*), and the pre-war “imperial pressure groups,” the Royal Colonial Institute, Lord Meath’s Empire Day Movement, the Victoria League, and the Round Table Group.³⁹ Together, they worked to construct a more agreeable empire, resurrecting Victorian era imagery of the imperial family and incorporating into it the internationalist rhetoric of co-operation, national freedom, and peace. Empire Day, which gained government support in 1916 and emphasized “‘Duty and Discipline,’ ‘Self-Sacrifice,’ ‘One King,’ [and] ‘One Empire’” is one example of efforts to spark post-war imperial patriotism and citizenship.⁴⁰ Other government and private propaganda included the Empire Day coverage provided by the newly established British Broadcasting

not made this amendment, the principle would have found Britain and other European empires in a serious dilemma vis-à-vis their colonies. Despite his amendment to the principle, it remained an important concept during the interwar period for a variety of groups. Karatani argues that the principle had “constant consequences for citizenship during the interwar period. The concept of citizenship became firmly linked to nationhood under the principle of national self-determination, however it was defined and regardless of whether a ‘nation’ existed or not. The formula for national citizenship was strengthened, indicating that people had to be members of the ‘nation’ of the political unit in order to be granted the status of its citizenship, and only citizens were entitled to choose the government as their representatives.” It fueled women’s suffrage movements in Europe, and as Michelle Stephens argues, it became a powerful argument for colonized people and African Americans. Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 110; and Michelle Stephens, “Black Transnationalism and the Politics of National Identity: West Indian Intellectuals in Harlem in the Age of War and Revolution,” *American Quarterly* 50, 3 (1998) 592-608.

³⁸ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 256.

³⁹ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 259-60.

⁴⁰ While not originally intended for the colonies, Empire Day (and its principles) was celebrated throughout schoolrooms in the southern and coastal towns of British West Africa. Meath introduced his Empire Day Movement shortly after the Boer War, in the early 1900s; however, the British government’s support came later and in response to strong anti-jingoist sentiment in the aftermath of the First War. In the 1920s, it became a statutory holiday in the dominions, and was celebrated in the West African colonies in the 1930s (possibly earlier). Laryea reported in a Gold Coast newspaper in 1934 Empire Day (May 24) was “set aside by Royal Command to be observed throughout the British Empire.” Its popularity in the dominions testifies to its appeal to supporters of the commonwealth system. Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire,” 97, 105; and T. T. Laryea, “Imperial Patriotism: A Very Wholesome Empire Day Speech,” *Times of West Africa*, June 6, 1934.

Corporation (BBC), and “a stream of empire magazines, novels, ‘Annuals’ for boys and girls, and songs,” and “stirring imperial films.”⁴¹

These and other forms of propaganda sought to encourage “imperial patriotism” and a sense of “oneness” throughout the Empire.⁴² They “honored” the essential diversity and unity of Britain’s subjects and elaborated the image of the Empire as a large and contented family with His Majesty and the Queen as the generous and benevolent parents of countries, regions, cultures, and peoples at different stages of “development.”⁴³ The family metaphor and the emphasis on commonwealth held the promise for some British and British Protected subjects that eventually even the “youngest members” of the Empire would “fly the nest” and join a future British Commonwealth as self-governing nations.⁴⁴

These efforts were all part of a larger post-war movement to reform British imperialism from a crude militaristic imperialism to a kinder, gentler, and more acceptable (and perhaps less imperial) empire that incorporated the spirit of the postwar period: peace and co-operation between *nations*. Imperial reform after the war focused mainly on the relationship between the “white” self-governing dominions and Britain. The “white dominions,” as they were referred to during this period, were governed by men of European origin who had established their authority through the destruction and

⁴¹ Empire Day was broadcast by the BBC. Porter also mentions statues and other “vehicles” of imperial propaganda, all of which have been well-documented by John MacKenzie, Jeffrey Richards, Arthur Byron, Jim English, and John Springhall. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 260.

⁴² Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance. Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 1999), 22-28.

⁴³ Bernard Porter notes that the metaphor of the “family” was not new; it had been used to discuss the Empire in the nineteenth century as well. What was new during the interwar period was the merging of the family metaphor with the idea of a commonwealth of nations. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialist*, 276.

⁴⁴ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 282.

domination of indigenous institutions and populations.⁴⁵ The white dominions had always had greater autonomy vis-à-vis Britain than any other part of the Empire, “as if they formed an inner community within the Empire.”⁴⁶ In 1917, these governments were granted official recognition of their national autonomy in exchange for their contributions to the war. A series of Imperial conferences followed during the 1920s and 1930s, each further defining the independence of the white dominion governments on domestic issues, mainly around citizenship, and finally, in 1929, recognition of the dominion government’s equality with Britain.⁴⁷ Despite their own contributions to the war, the dependencies received little in exchange for their war effort. In fact, as the dominions were being rewarded both during and after the war, the so-called “subject races . . . remained mostly subject.”⁴⁸

Imperial officials, however, did their best to ignore these contradictions and focused their imperial propaganda on the idea of a commonwealth which at this time was still only a concept—the product of white dominion-driven efforts to increase their own governmental autonomy and authority vis-à-vis Britain.⁴⁹ In theory, the commonwealth

⁴⁵ Leila Rupp refers to Australia, Canada, the Union of South Africa, and New Zealand as “neo-Europe” in her book *Worlds of Women*. More accurately, they were the white dominion governments of the British Empire. *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁴⁶ Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 87.

⁴⁷ There were constant negotiations made around the “Common Code” which concerned recognition of a common citizenship and local citizenship at this time. In 1930, the dominion governments recognized two principles, their allegiance to the common code system and their right to establish their own nationality. These issues continued to be worked out at the Imperial Conferences of the 1930s, which ultimately resulted in Commonwealth citizenship. Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 87-88 and on citizenship within the common code system, see pages 90-94.

⁴⁸ Morris, *Farwell the Trumpets*, 209.

⁴⁹ At this time, the early 1920s, the commonwealth was an idea which had not yet been created. The “Common Code” was being discussed as one option for the relationship between Britain and the dominions. The system involved a series of conferences and complex negotiations of a common citizenship and dominion nationality. A dual citizenship system was finally worked out in 1930. The Commonwealth was a product of these negotiations and was formalized by the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 83-97.

was a voluntary association of autonomous nations working co-operatively towards the common good. For some, it seemed an “easy” transition from the existing relationship between Britain and the dominions (the dependencies were not part of this discussion). The commonwealth combined nicely with post-war internationalism in its recognition of national autonomy (self-determination) while maintaining imperial unity—making “the empire more widely palatable domestically” and internationally.⁵⁰ By focusing on the dominions and commonwealth, imperialists reframed the Empire as “simply anticipating internationalism,” emerging from the war a “smaller League of British Nations” that stood for “peace and good fellowship . . . towards all the nations of the world.”⁵¹

Of course, advances in dominion devolution had the potential to encourage the “rest of the empire” to press for a similar arrangement with Britain.⁵² Such demands were received far differently than the movements of the white dominion governments. White Britons argued that the “dependent” empire was not ready for self-government and would have to wait. Nevertheless, this prolonged delay did not stop them from forming nationalist projects, and in some cases advocating imperial reform that would improve their position within the Empire.⁵³ Britain’s subjects from the colonial territories in West

⁵⁰ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialist*, 275, 278.

⁵¹ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 277.

⁵² The *Saturday Review* suggested that the repercussions of dominion autonomy could be even greater. It reported that certain difficulties were in the way—“such for instance, as arise from the fact that internationally the British Empire is regarded as a unit, and that, if the Dominions have separate representation, foreign countries with large dependencies may make a similar claim.” In spite of these dangers, the paper argued, “the very serious question of a common Empire policy must be resolutely faced.” “Imperial Foreign Policy,” *Saturday Review*, June 14, 1924, 602. The *Saturday Review* published regular coverage of the negotiations between the dominion and imperial governments in 1924, a key year with various imperial conferences. After the Imperial Economic Conference of 1924, the Prime Minister stated his intention to involve the dominions as “partners with us in everything we do.” The paper pointed out the hypocrisy in this statement. “Empire Unity,” *Saturday Review*, June 28, 1924, 655.

⁵³ The so-called “Second British Empire” refers to the Empire after the loss of Britain’s colonies in North America. This “Second Empire” was undergoing transformation after the First World War. The self-governing colonies were gaining greater independence within the Empire, while the “dependent” empire

Africa, in particular African students and professionals in London, were following dominion nationalism closely and taking careful notes. They read the British newspapers and followed arguments made by people from other parts of the Empire. They were especially interested in the development of a commonwealth system and discussions taking shape in other parts of the world, among African Americans, and within the international community associated with the League of Nations.

In addition, they eagerly read, interpreted, and critiqued everything they could find about Africa from the many perspectives available in the British and West African press and academic scholarship. They watched closely as the dual mandate system was established in their home countries through the creation of a series of colonial ordinances and constitutions that divided the governance of the territory into two distinct units—the African chieftaincy that controlled land and the people, and a colonial administration that controlled resources and commerce. The dual mandate, first proposed by Frederick Lugard, was instrumental to the establishment of indirect rule in Africa. A critical component was the idea of Africa as a “traditional” society divided into “ethnic” or “tribal” groups.

This British vision of Africa challenged the political future of educated West Africans at home and abroad. Their identity and vision for Africa did not correspond with Britain’s. In fact, most objected to this construction of Africa and labored to define

and India continued to be “ruled by means of a heavy hand from Britain with a mixture of coercion and collaboration.” Outside the “formal empire” were Latin America and China; Britain’s “so-called informal empire.” Within the “Second Empire” political devolution was stretching the “disparate and loosely structured entity” to its limits. Some scholars have labeled the empire after the First World War the “Third British Empire.” This empire saw the addition of mandate territories from the League of Nations and was well over extended. During the interwar years, the Empire was full of turmoil and had to make numerous concessions. Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 27-31.

their own institutions, using the language of post-war nations and empires. Still others developed a vision entirely outside indirect rule, based on an imperial model, a united, self-governed West African nation that would reflect the civilization of Africans and would be based on a “modern” form of government best suited to lead Africa to “progress.” A number of the students associated with WASU invested in the hope of achieving a position similar to the dominions, and of eventually joining the Commonwealth (formalized in 1931) as self-governing nations equal to Britain.⁵⁴ They were attracted to the human universalism and hope embedded in the new internationalism and the commonwealth system.⁵⁵ They seized this language and launched their own vision for Africa and the Empire. Among the more popular ideas of the twenties among students and intellectuals was the idea of a united West Africa (the Gambia, Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) as a self-governed nation within a vision of the Empire structured as a commonwealth along the lines developed by the NCBWA.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 202. For a discussion of imperial reform and imperial patriotism among people representing the dominion and colonial territories in the early 1900s see Ian Fletcher, “Double Meanings: Nation and Empire in the Edwardian Era,” in Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn, Thinking With and Through the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 246-259.

⁵⁵ Of course, there is a much longer and more complicated history than can be recounted in this dissertation, but suffice it to say that India was also asking for imperial reform at this time, suggesting the Government of India Act” in 1924, and the “question” of India was commonly debated in the British press. James Morris writes that Britain knew by the twenties that “India was lost” and set its sights on the “Crown Colonies, once the poor relations of Empire, now its chief hope.” WASU modeled its union after the Indian Student Union in London and followed the arguments made by Indians closely in their magazine and in the West African press. “The Indian Reforms Inquiry,” *Saturday Review*, June 28, 1924, 655; James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 308.

⁵⁶ Casely Hayford’s *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911) borrows heavily from the Greek system to imagine an African nationalism based on universalism rather than racial particularism, and to present an alternative to the British imperial model. His imperial vision was internationalist in its perspective and framework, and promoted world peace. Fletcher, “Double Meanings,” 250-1.

West Africa and the Post-war Empire

In 1924, African students and British imperialists were both poised to determine the future of West Africa. After the war, Britain focused its attention on its colonies in Africa and cultivated a “new genre of imperial service” in these territories.⁵⁷ The Colonial Office’s approach was driven by the popular belief that Britain’s African possessions “strewn across a continent without culture, without history—those bold and earthy possessions did not require intellectuals, but all-round men of practical skills.”⁵⁸ The men needed in these territories, “said Frederick Lugard, Governor of Nigeria, were plain English gentlemen, ‘with an almost passionate conception of fair play, of protection of the weak, and of playing the game.’”⁵⁹

The British colonial governments in West Africa had long been mediating concessions between European companies and Africans. Lugard’s *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, published in 1922 and based on his experiences in East Africa, offered a framework for these kinds of negotiations. It argued for the creation of a dual government that involved a large (and fragmented) “native administration” responsible for land and “native” affairs, and a small colonial administration responsible for commerce and trade (which in many ways disadvantaged African farmers and laborers).⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 309.

⁵⁸ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 309.

⁵⁹ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 309.

⁶⁰ How to rule the West African colonies was a longstanding source of debate since their acquisition at the end of the nineteenth century, and tied into the pre and post WWI discussions of imperial reform and the formation of an imperial economic union (of the commonwealth variety). As noted by K. Dike Nworah, “The battle of economic ideas which had loomed large on the imperial horizon ever since Joseph Chamberlain fired Britain’s imagination in 1895 was eventually reduced to two contending philosophies of estate development. Should the traditional British policy in West Africa of allowing Africans to develop their own resources assisted by technical instruction from the colonial administration prevail, or should development be taken out of African hands and run mainly in the interests of European corporations?” K. Dike Nworah, “The Politics of Lever’s West African Concessions, 1907-1913,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5, 2 (1972), 248. The terms of the debate changed little after Chamberlain’s

Colonial ordinances and constitutions formulated for the colonies in British West Africa during the 1920s were modeled after Lugard's dual system. It formalized the political relationship between what the British constructed as two distinct Africas—an Africa of “natives” and chiefs, and a British Africa of commerce and industry that dominated the coastal areas of the region.⁶¹ As will be discussed, the West African students were most attracted to the Africa of commerce and industry and, while respectful of the chieftaincy, did not support it as the model for the future political structure of the region.

The colonial government was not to intervene with African affairs, but to be respectful of Africans and their needs. In the Gold Coast, for example, administrators were reminded of their role as “Civil Servants,” and their obligation to “help the African and to serve him.”⁶² This kind of Colonial Service, at least on the surface, complemented the ideal of “trusteeship.” These policies were all part of a changing British imperialism after the war that was “not too aggressive, not too dogmatic, not even

speech. The critical difference during the 1920s was the First War, internationalism, and Britain's campaign to promote a new image on the one hand, and the examples of capitalistic imperialism illustrated most openly by the Union of South Africa, who essentially denied Africans the right to own land in the early 1900s, and similar forms of economic oppression and land seizure taking place in East Africa on the other. Both of these “events” and concerns influenced Lord Lugard's dual mandate system and its implementation during the 1920s. Lugard had been working on his vision for a dual mandate first in East Africa at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. His theory was published in 1922 and presented a combination of the “contending philosophies” outlined by Nworah. The dual mandate saw small colonial administration which continued to “protect” African control over land and discourage monopolies according to the concession ordinances in the various colonies, though it more actively defined and supported an African government that oversaw “native affairs.” It also promoted the idea of the colonial enterprise as a joint economic and political venture between Africans and Europeans. Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922).

⁶¹ My discussion of “two Africas” is inspired by Mrinalini Sinha's description of the “two Indias” the India of Princes and British India. Similar to the situation among West African nationalists from this period, many Indian nationalist saw the princely states that gained visibility and power in the 1920s as “out of step socially and less ‘advanced’ politically than the provinces of British India.” West African students used the chieftaincy when it served their goals, and incorporated it into their political projects in various ways throughout the period; however, they did not see the chieftaincy as the future political structure for West Africa. *Specters of Mother India*, 32.

⁶² Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 310-11.

too sure of itself.”⁶³ According to Morris, “post-war imperialists were, without doubt, the nicest rulers the Empire ever sent abroad.”⁶⁴

Britain’s policies in West Africa during the interwar period were not fueled simply by the desire to help and serve Africans. A “Native Authority” that handled “native affairs” made good economic sense; it significantly decreased Britain’s economic investment in the domestic affairs of the colonies and protectorate territories; it required less manpower and money towards social development; and it declared Britain responsible for managing (and controlling) the wealth of the colonies—its real interest in the region. The war had left Britain economically strained and eager to maximize colonial profits and Lugard’s system made economic sense. After the war, the colonies combined accounted for forty-one percent of Britain’s trade and eighty-six percent of its foreign investment. As the unemployment rate in Great Britain increased during the twenties, 870,000 British people found employment in the colonies.⁶⁵

The British colonies in West Africa were reportedly making “great strides” at this time. In 1924, *West Africa*, a European-owned London-based newspaper, predicted that the region was entering a new “era” marked by “greater profits for Africans and Europeans.” The paper suggested that all “public men” of “authority” who had spent any time in the region understood its contemporary and future economic position within the Empire.⁶⁶ The dual mandate system was well suited to imperial propaganda, which emphasized co-operative economic relations. Proponents of the system argued that it

⁶³ The mentality within the imperial services led by Major Ralph Furse was changing at this time. Furse’s plans for reform were in step with the spirit of the post-war benevolent empire. Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 308, 311.

⁶⁴ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 311.

⁶⁵ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 258.

⁶⁶ “West Africa and the Exhibition,” *West Africa*, May 24, 1924, 1.

preserved African “tradition,” “culture” and “institutions,” and expanded the role that Africans would play in the “colonial enterprise.” As Lugard explained, the dual mandate would see African involvement at “every stage of the journey.”⁶⁷ Africans would not be confined to the role of “fixed wage earner” as was still being tried by a “part of the East African community” and failing “more completely” each day; Africans and Europeans would be partners in a “joint enterprise.”⁶⁸

West Africa argued that the British colonial government would be well-served in their efforts to co-operate with the “natives,” rather than taking their lands (as seen in South Africa). The paper predicted the dual mandate would allow Britain to increase its profits, calming resentment and avoiding future riots and improving its image in the eyes of the international community. The paper saluted Lugard and Guggisberg (Governor of the Gold Coast) for cultivating the possibility of “real progress, contentment, and mutual respect” through their support of the “right kind of imperialism” that they argued worked in the service of the greater economic prosperity of the Empire; an approach they suggested would have “never occurred to such men as Stanley and Rhodes.”⁶⁹ A dual government deeply invested in maximizing profits for Britain and keeping the “natives” contented must have seemed a giant step among contemporary imperialists towards the “non-imperial” liberal empire.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Lugard’s discussion of the dual mandate was part of an article that appeared in *West Africa*’s seventy-two page supplement to the famous British Empire Exhibition of 1924 at Wembley. The supplement accompanied the May 24th issue and featured articles by Mr. Thomas Welsh and Mr. Lewis Smart. May 24th is also Empire Day. The quote about Lugard’s article is not taken directly from the article, but from the paper’s summary of the supplement which appeared on the front page. “West Africa and the Exhibition,” *West Africa*, May 24, 1924, 1.

⁶⁸ “West Africa and the Exhibition,” *West Africa*, May 24, 1924, 1.

⁶⁹ “West Africa and the Exhibition,” *West Africa*, May 24, 1924, 1.

⁷⁰ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 258.

While in the eyes of the British the dual mandate system maintained many of the principles being advocated by imperial reformers at this time—greater autonomy in the realm of culture and domestic affairs, and unity and co-operation in the area of trade and commerce—the system was unlikely to yield the kind of modern nation western-educated Africans were hankering for. It was based on an image of Africans as “tribal traditionalists” who were anything but modern political and economic subjects. It denied Africans a powerful role in trade, commerce, and industry by using the government structure to separate the land from its products, and, in turn, to determine the value of those products. African students desired one African-controlled government that oversaw law, trade, commerce, industry, and culture. A divided government as outlined by indirect rule was not the best vehicle through which to re-enter the Empire as an independent nation or the world community as a modern nation. Lastly, the dual system specifically empowered chiefs and disempowered educated urban West Africans.

Race and Empire

At the same time that European firms and some colonial officials were glorifying the dual mandate as a “joint enterprise” between Africans and Europeans, the Empire remained, as it had always been (and perhaps even more so after the war), divided along racial lines broadly composed of “white” dominion governments and “non-white” colonial “dependencies.” In 1928, a member of the West African Students’ Union (WASU) in London writing under the name “ADE” in the Union’s magazine *Wasu* reported,

The Great War of 1914-1918 has shaken the foundations of European civilisation, and its horrors ever present in the minds of civilised people have brought about a universal change of outlook. It has been realised . . . that all peoples of the world are indispensable to one another . . . to-day there is clearly to be seen a definite movement towards the establishment of ‘peace off [*sic*] earth and good will among men,’ and in this glorious movement Great Britain is destined to play a most prominent part. But, paradoxical as it may seem, Great Britain—the apostle of liberty and international champion of the cause of humanity—suffers within its own empire capitalism and misguided imperialism, the modern form of slavery, to sap the virility of her wards.⁷¹

As noted by “ADE,” Africa after the war was facing greater exploitation. Racist discourse and representations of Africa and Africans as “primitive” and in need of “civilization” had long been used to “justify” European missionary and colonizing projects. As West African students discovered in London, this discourse on Africa—which encompassed both images and stories about the “Dark Continent” and Africans as a “primitive” people without history, culture, religion, identity, or logic—was a major obstacle to educated Africans’ achieving greater autonomy and recognition within colonial, imperial, and international structures.

During the 1920s, African students spent the bulk of their political energy challenging and attempting to overturn these images. They sought to do so by publishing research articles, sending letters to the British press, and offering public lectures on African history, culture, philosophy, religion and law. These activities were designed to “educate” the British people (as well as Africans and the international community) about Africa. They were pursued with a deep commitment to redeeming Africa, “lifting the veil” on the continent and its peoples and “revealing” to the world its “truth,” that is, its civilization and contribution to world history. In their entirety, their actions presented an

⁷¹ “ADE,” “Great Britain and the Negro Race: A Moral Responsibility,” *Wasu* 6 and 7 (August 1928), 17.

argument for Africa's role in human history and its place in the emergent "New World Order."

The imperial rhetoric of unity and oneness during the postwar period must have seemed all too paradoxical for Africans living in London at this time. As educated Africans and members of the British Empire, their daily encounters with race discrimination, inequality and injustice must have made the Empire Exhibition's celebration of imperial diversity and unity seem painfully counterfeit, as well as unfair when one considers that in the same instance dominion governments were writing their own nationality laws. Dominating popular and government opinion at this time was the "notion that Africans were somehow genetically programmed to be slower than other people in achieving this 'civilized' end," and thus, the Empire's justification for their continued colonial presence on the continent.⁷² Popular British texts and films "habitually stereotyped black people in the most patronizing and disparaging ways: in children's books and comics, for example, where the 'Little black Sambo' image was almost ubiquitous."⁷³ Illustrating this opinion (and political policy) is the opening line to Lugard's *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*: "Africa has been justly termed 'the Dark Continent,' for the secrets of its peoples, its lakes, and mountains and rivers, have remained undisclosed not merely to modern civilisation, but through all the ages of which history has any record."⁷⁴ Africa as pre-civilization, and as an open and exciting "invitation" to European discovery and "development" was the preferred "Africa" for Britons during the 1920s.

⁷² Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 278.

⁷³ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 278.

⁷⁴ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 1.

These representations of Africa were inextricably bound up with British culture, politics and identity. An example of how British children were educated to believe in racial hierarchies is a series of children's letters published by West African students in their club magazine *Wasu*. The first letter was written by "Amy," an English school girl of thirteen years old to Ama, a school girl from the Gold Coast. Amy's letter was full of stereotypes about Africa and Africans. She referred to Africa as the "Dark Continent" and assured Ama that people in Great Britain were anxious to learn more about and promise to "do all we can to help you, for, after all, we are all God's children."⁷⁵ She asked Ama if West African men (students) "preferred" to live in England because there was "something wrong" in their own countries, or, she wondered, was it "because they want[ed] to get rid of the hot climate and the lions and tigers, and elephants and big black snakes and monkeys?"⁷⁶ She asked Ama to send her a tiger cub by post. She ended her letter with a questions about why "Africans paint their faces, file their teeth and adorn themselves with leaves and masks" as she had seen in a film on Africa shown in England.⁷⁷ It is doubtful that the letter was written by an English school girl, though it does show the popular images and beliefs about Africa and Africans that circulated in England during the interwar period. Her comments reveal how not only children, but people of all ages thought about Africa and the various images that African students living in London had to confront in their daily lives.

⁷⁵ "From Amy to Ama," *The Children's Page, Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933), 41.

⁷⁶ "From Amy to Ama," *The Children's Page, Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933), 41.

⁷⁷ In another issue, a young school boy from Nigeria responds to Amy's letter, attempting to correct Amy's stereotypic ideas about Africa. Ama's response is never published. "From Amy to Ama," *The Children's Page, Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933), 41.

African students experienced first-hand the Empire's uneven embrace of its subjects, tolerance of race prejudice, and acceptance of "capitalism and misguided imperialism" in the colonies (and dominions). These representations had an enormous impact on their lives. As many discovered in their travels abroad, not all British subjects were tied to the Crown in exactly the same way, and some had fewer rights than others. In their search for housing and employment, they became all too familiar with the "colour bar." Finding affordable housing was nearly impossible, and many landlords did not rent to Africans. The dormitories set up for West African seamen in England were described by Nnamdi Azikiwe as far below the standard of living for most English people.⁷⁸ As they walked the streets of London, used public transportation, and socialized in bars, restaurants, dance halls, cinemas, and theaters, Africans were assaulted by the ignorance and racism of English men and women.

Avid readers of the British press, few African students would have missed the racist comments that appeared in England's "respected" daily newspapers, weeklies, and reviews (that represented "all political parties") on a routine basis.⁷⁹ A Nigerian law student, A. Kasumu Soetan, described the opinions expressed in *West Africa* as a "welcome departure from the solidarity of ignorance among the press, theaters, cinemas, and in some cases even the pulpits" that brought Africans into "disrepute by characterising them as 'wild men,' 'bushmen,' 'cannibals,' etc., and showing them on the screen often as fit only for menial duties and ignominious performances," overall,

⁷⁸ His reference is to housing in Liverpool during the early 1930s, though one could expect to find a similar situation in London during the 1920s. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey. An Autobiography* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1970), 197.

⁷⁹ *West Africa* reported that offensive and racist language was used "on a regular basis in England's respected national and local press." It suggested that of the newspapers representing the views of the different political parties, those which supported the Labour Party were among the "less" offensive. "Manners Makyth-Empire," *West Africa*, May 10, 1924, 1.

“labeling them as everlasting ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water.’” Soetan asked why so many of the English men who traveled to Africa felt compelled upon their return home to “circulate wild and unscrupulous mis-representations” after having enjoyed “the good of [its] land.”⁸⁰

These kinds of representations of Africa and Africans, as Soetan and many other African students in London pointed out, “consciously or unconsciously retard[ed] the progress of British civilisation.”⁸¹ If, as imperial propaganda suggested, the British Empire was a large “family” of “daughter” countries, racism in the British press was unacceptable. By pointing out the racism that plagued the so-called imperial family, the students exposed the paradoxical nature of this image, while also opening a public discussion about racism and empire. In their letters to the press, the students played to imperialists’ fears and anxieties about a weakened and weakening post-war Empire, warning Britain that empires and “nations rise and fall in proportion as they use or abuse power entrusted to them.”⁸² Pointing to historical evidence, they argued that empires were only as strong as their weakest member.

The majority of West African students living in London at this time were British subjects (a fewer number of them were British Protected subjects) and some identified themselves as British Africans. They were conscious of West Africa’s position within the Empire and throughout the interwar period engaged in a conversation about West Africa and its relationship to the “new” (reformed) empire with Members of Parliament (usually Labour), the press, Colonial Office, Victoria League, Fabian Society, League

⁸⁰ A. Kasumu Soetan, “Africans and Britons,” Letter to the Editor, *West Africa*, May 10, 1924, 445.

⁸¹ Soetan, “Africans and Britons,” 445.

⁸² Soetan, “Africans and Britons,” 445.

Against Imperialism, and many other public and private organizations in London. Most students, especially those associated with the Union of Students of African Descent (USAD) and the West African Students' Union (WASU) followed official and unofficial imperial rhetoric closely, and, in this period, used it in a variety of ways to lobby for different political objectives and to re-present their own image of West Africa and the British Empire. In fact, it was the rhetoric and international "spirit" of the period that allowed "ADE" to shame the British Empire (the self-proclaimed "apostle of liberty and international champion of the cause of humanity") for allowing the Union of South Africa to legally decree that Africans, "who form[ed] the sacred trust of Imperial Britain," to not "raise up their voice against exploitation" and for turning a blind eye to a similar situation in East Africa as the Governor of Kenya.⁸³ Changes to the "imperial program" and the colonial administration in the West African colonies after the war ushered in numerous opportunities for West African students to voice their own opinions and participate in the process of imperial reform and re-imagining Africa.

This was an opportune moment for the students to ask the question: to whom did the more inclusive and kinder British Empire owe its support—to its loyal subjects in Africa, or to capitalist imperialists? The students were well-informed of the fact that behind the post-war image of imperialism was the "abominable influence of capitalism" and racism and they used the contradictions of empire to demand reform and as an opportunity to present an alternative image of Africa in the British press. Their representation of Africa involved their use of the very institutions of empire—clubs,

⁸³ And, the imperial government had done little to stand in the path of the "capitalistic-imperialists" who were advocating a "United States of British Africa." "ADE," "Great Britain and the Negro Race," *Wasu* 6 and 7 (August 1928), 17-18.

conferences, the press, and propaganda. The students' efforts to re-represent Africa in England were not new and had been tried for many generations. Unique to this cohort was the particular context in which they found themselves after the war, and their response to the movement towards co-operation at the colonial, imperial, and international levels.

West Africa and the Empire Exhibition, London, 1924

One of the more “spectacular” examples of imperial advertisement and, more so, the re-framing of the Empire from this period was the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 at the newly constructed Wembley Stadium. The Exhibition and the press coverage that surrounded it, especially as it concerned Africa, provided the students an opportunity to publically organize their own political projects in relation to post-war imperialism. The Exhibition was a massive undertaking, the “biggest fair Britain had ever known.” It involved all but two of the fifty-eight countries that made up the British Empire, and covered 216 acres of North London and its total expenditure exceeded £4.5 million.⁸⁴ It featured (among many other things) “a statute of the Prince of Wales made of Canadian butter . . . , a posse of Tibetan trumpeters,” reconstructions of West African villages, and “its own private railroad line, the Never-Stop Railway,” which circled the entire Exhibition “night and day.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ The Gambia and Gibraltar did not participate.

⁸⁵ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 300.

The British Empire Exhibition was, at heart, “a vast advertisement, inspiring to some, laughable to others, [and] innocently entertaining to the vast majority.”⁸⁶ It sought to teach the British people to “think imperially and act imperially.” Its proponents saw it as an opportunity to foster a “feeling of common loyalty and obligation” that would “maintain the integrity of the Empire.”⁸⁷ Its primary objective, according to members of the Exhibition organizing committee composed of “generals, retired pro-consuls and imperial tycoons,” was to “foster the fellowship of the Empire.”⁸⁸ The King called it a “great achievement” and “illustration to the world of the ‘spirit of free and tolerant co-operation . . . between brothers for the better development of the family estate.’”⁸⁹ He believed it facilitated learning between the peoples of the British Empire, and taught them how to fulfill “their reciprocal wants and aspirations.”⁹⁰ In a single day, boasted one Exhibition enthusiast, visitors “would learn more about the empire” at Wembley “than a year of hard study.”⁹¹

In writing and speaking about the Empire Exhibition, government officials, imperialists, and members of the British public were actively re-inventing the British Empire as a political structure that they claimed had always promoted the “spirit of

⁸⁶ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 300.

⁸⁷ “Empire and Education,” *Saturday Review*, May 31, 1924, 554-5.

⁸⁸ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 301; Solanke, “An Outrage,” 247; and “Notes of the Week,” *Saturday Review*, April 26, 1924, 424 (front page). Porter argues that the propaganda from this period asked the British people to revert to a mid-nineteenth-century perception and to admire the Empire “for its non-imperial qualities.” The Exhibition was very much in keeping with this goal. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 255.

⁸⁹ “Notes of the Week,” *Saturday Review*, April 26, 1924, 424 (front page).

⁹⁰ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 300-1.

⁹¹ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 260. For more information on the exhibition, see Donald Maxwell, *Wembley in Colour: Being Both an Impression and a Memento of the British Empire Exhibition of 1924* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1924); Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, 299-302; and John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1984), 108-12.

freedom and tolerance.”⁹² In its coverage of Wembley, the *Saturday Review* argued that British imperialism was never at odds with the core values of the postwar period, that is, co-operation, national self-determination (in this case discussed as “freedom”), and peace. The paper suggested that the “empire” celebrated at Wembley was not the “empire” that so many of their contemporaries felt compelled to “belittle,” but was, they argued, as it always had been, a “Commonwealth of Free Nations.” It perceived this new model of imperialism to be ripe with potentiality, which if used “aright” could provide the world with an example of co-operative relations and collaborative entrepreneurship. Thus, according to the *Review*, the Exhibition was “a gesture of confidence to the world” that was “still reeling under the hammer-blows of a war which disorganized and permanently injured its economic system.” It was a representation of what “enlightened people” meant by “their imperialism to-day.” It was also a “step towards ultimate understanding and co-operation between the nations of the world,” and “a practical means of attaining development and fostering affection and co-operation among its own participants.”⁹³

With post-war Britain more dependent on the Crown colonies than ever before, the Exhibition was the perfect vehicle through which to promote previously “neglected” parts of the Empire, namely the dependencies and protectorate territories. The spotlight, more than ever before, was on the British colonies in West Africa, which imperialists believed were showing signs of “progress” and promise of future prosperity. As a testimony to their words, a rich assortment of products from the region could be seen

⁹² “The Meaning of Wembley,” *Saturday Review*, April 26, 1924, 428.

⁹³ “The Meaning of Wembley,” 428.

“piled high” in the West African displays.⁹⁴ West African countries, including Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, and Nigeria (the Gambia did not participate) contributed a total of £110,000 to the exhibit, and shared nine and a half acres of space with South Africa and the East African group.⁹⁵ West African officials, including the Governor of the Gold Coast and his wife, Lady Guggisberg, were in attendance and several “noteworthy” West Africans were invited to attend the exhibit.⁹⁶

The West African section was housed in a “mud-baked walled town” and contained several workshops “which showed tribesmen and women at work on a variety of arts and crafts.”⁹⁷ Approximately “seventy representatives of the Yoruba, Fanti, Hausa, and Mendi tribes of West Africa, craftsmen—weavers, leather-workers, brass-workers and others” carried “on in the Exhibition the chief industries of the West African colonies.”⁹⁸ The display was accompanied by daily viewings of “some 40,000 feet of film,” captured by a “special camera party sent recently to the wilds of West Africa,” depicting the “natural beauties of Nigeria and the Gold Coast.”⁹⁹ The West African section helped stage a “positive” image of a “traditional” and static Africa—an image that combined colonialists efforts to “invent” a “traditional” African authority in the colonies. The exhibit helped create temporal distance between Africa and the “West” by imagining Africa as a “pure” pre-civilized space that held truths about the origin and

⁹⁴ Woodham, “Images of Africa and Design,” 15.

⁹⁵ Jonathan Woodham, “Images of Africa and Design at the British Empire Exhibitions between the Wars,” *Journal of Design History* 2, 2 (1989): 32.

⁹⁶ Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Communism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998), 31.

⁹⁷ MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 108. Woodham, “Images of Africa and Design,” 16. Originally quoted in J. W-G, “The West Coast of Africa at Wembley,” in ‘Africa at Wembley,’ Exhibition Supplement, *The African World*, May 24, 1924, 13-17.

⁹⁸ MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 109.

⁹⁹ F. A. Fletcher and A. D. Brooks, *British and Foreign Exhibitions and Their Postcards, Part 2* (East Boldon: The authors, 1979), 51-5. Quoted in MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 109.

past of western societies.¹⁰⁰ In the Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone pavilions, the modern British craftsman could “face anew the truth enunciated by Shakespeare and by Tolstoy, that ‘the art itself is nature,’ for ‘art is an organ of life,’” allowing him to “get back to this true outlook,” and “feel happy among the natural arts of mankind, as yet untouched by trade with the outside world.”¹⁰¹

At the same time that Exhibition officials were conveying a peaceful and contented “traditional” Africa, they were also attempting to justify British colonialism in Africa. Exhibition publications described cannibalism and human sacrifice as “native customs” in West Africa and suggested that British presence in the region was beneficial. Another way that the Exhibition sought to naturalize colonialism was through sexually charged representations of African women, and, in turn, Africa. An example of this are the following lines from an Exhibition performance by Billy Merson entitled “In my Little Wigwam, Wembley Way”:

There you will find me in a costume gay
In charge of the girls from Africa.
All they wear is beads and a grin;
That is where the exhibition comes in.¹⁰²

The larger implication of this imagery is the feminization of Africa and the suggestion that Africa was welcoming of European penetration.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

¹⁰¹ Woodham, “Images of Africa and Design,” 16. Originally quoted in J. W-G, “The West Coast of Africa at Wembley,” in ‘Africa at Wembley,’ Exhibition Supplement, *The African World*, May 24, 1924, 13-17.

¹⁰² Wembley Way is one of the exhibition streets (the streets names were chosen by Rudyard Kipling and included Drake’s Way, Dominion Way, Union Approach, Atlantic Slope, Craftman’s Way, and others). While MacKenzie does not include this information in his description of the West Africa section, I suspect, based on the lyrics to the song, that it was located on Wembley Way. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 109-11.

The *Evening News* and other British newspapers played to this image of an uncivilized and feminized Africa. The *Evening News* perpetuated the image of an underdeveloped “tropics” where there were “large tracts of land imperfectly cultivated by natives or not cultivated at all.”¹⁰⁴ In its coverage of the Nigerian pavilion, it depicted a colonial government breathlessly struggling to bring “civilization” to a country still steeped in “barbarism.” The paper boasted, “the machinery of modern civilised government” had “within the brief space of 20 years” nearly abolished “cannibalism, slave trading, [and] obscure black magic rites of almost incredible barbarity.”¹⁰⁵ Though, it argued that in some parts of Nigeria “human meat was sold openly in the markets in quite recent times.”¹⁰⁶

Other papers, including the *Sunday Express* and the *Saturday Review* ran so-called “humorous” sketches in which journalists ridiculed the West African section of the Exhibition. The *Saturday Review* thought it absurd to display “Gold Coast ‘natives’ in European dress.” The *Sunday Express* played to the gendered and sexualized construction of Africa. It ran a piece entitled “When West Africa Woos,” an interview with a West African woman (who was part of the exhibit) on the topic of marriage and love-making in Africa.¹⁰⁷ The article was introduced by a drawing of two orangutans and

¹⁰³ Franz Fanon discussed a similar positioning of colonizer and colonized in the context Algeria and European discourses on the veiling and unveiling of Algerian women. “Algeria Unveiled,” *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). See also Diana Fuss’ reading of this essay. *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 149-154.

¹⁰⁴ MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 111.

¹⁰⁵ Solanke included a transcript of the original article which ran in the *Evening News* on March 5, 1924 under the heading “Cannibalism” in his letter to *West Africa*. He also included a full transcription of his original letter sent to the editor of the *Evening News* in response to “Cannibalism.” The *Evening News* did not publish the letter in its entirety. A version of the original letter would have appeared in the paper around March 17, 1924. Ladipo Solanke, “An Outrage,” Letter to the Editor, *West Africa*, March 22, 1924, 247.

¹⁰⁶ Solanke, “An Outrage,” 247.

¹⁰⁷ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 25.

the words “[o]ne of the features of Wembley is a West African village ruled by a native princess. Below she tells the story of love as it is made in Akropong.”¹⁰⁸ Similar to Merson’s performance of “My Little Wigwam,” this article (along with other articles, drawings, and photographs on the West African section) positioned Africa as feminine in relation to a masculine Britain. By asking African women about their sexual lives and publishing this information in their newspaper, the *Sunday Express* created a situation in which a disembodied Britain objectified (through interview techniques) an embodied and sexualized Africa and, in the process, reinforced the power dynamic between Britain and Africa. These kinds of representations of African women and Africa, according to the African students who protested the press coverage of Wembley, failed to respect the privacy (and humanity) of West Africans, and, thus, demonstrated the racism and ignorance of a certain “section of the British press.”¹⁰⁹

Among them was Nigerian law student and soon to be Secretary of WASU, Ladipo Solanke, who sent a letter of protest to the *Evening News* (which published only part of his original letter) and to *West Africa* (which published his letter in full and a transcript of the *Evening News*’ article). In his letter, Solanke accused the *Evening News* of having “grossly . . . mislead the British public,” and having caused “serious harm” to Nigerians (and other West African students) in London. The Exhibition, he pointed out, was meant to educate the British people about the Empire in order to foster understanding that would lead to unity and co-operation—the foundation of post-war imperialism. He asked that the paper, “in fairness” to Nigerian students and in the “name of the hundreds of students from West Africa now in London,” give “equal prominence to the facts of the

¹⁰⁸ “Manners Makyth-Empire,” *West Africa*, May 10, 1924, 1 and Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 25.

¹⁰⁹ “Manners Makyth-Empire,” 1.

case” that showed no evidence of cannibalism in the history of Nigeria. He condemned the *Evening News* for printing such a “deplorable” article “before the opening of the British Empire Exhibition to which Nigeria has contributed many thousands of pounds, and which no doubt will be visited by many Nigerians who may be looked upon as cannibals by the British public.”¹¹⁰

Solanke noted that, contrary to press constructions of a primitive Africa, there were newspapers in Nigeria, and Nigerians did not “write in them of the days of barbarity which England emerged from as being the recent history of England in order to prejudice [the Nigerian people] against the British.” Using women as a marker of civilization, Solanke reminded the British public that a mere forty years had passed since the many years after slave-trading had been abolished in West Africa the “wife of an Essex man was sold openly with a halter round her neck in a market.”¹¹¹ Just as Exhibition authorities and members of the British press used women to represent Africa as uncivilized, Solanke referred to the status of women and men’s treatment of them as an indication of men’s civilization, in this case, English men’s civilization. It is interesting to note that this discussion (on both sides, British and African) did not involve women as writers, and yet the debate about Africa’s civilization and its relation to Britain was fought almost entirely through representations of women, gender, and sexuality.¹¹²

Following Solanke’s letter, A. Kasumu Soetan submitted a letter to *West Africa* expressing his own concerns about racism in the British press. He argued that the press coverage of the West Africa section threatened to undermine the purpose of the

¹¹⁰ Solanke, “An Outrage,” 247.

¹¹¹ Solanke, “An Outrage,” 247.

¹¹² African women members of USAD participated in the protest through the Union. Women did not submit letters to the press. All of the letters were signed by African men.

Exhibition. The Exhibition would “soon be in full swing” and England would be “overcrowded with men of diverse colours and tongues.” If the Exhibitions authorities were to succeed in “promoting healthy spirit of fellowship between ruler and ruled,” he suggested that “Englishmen” would have to shelve “opprobrious epithets and undue show of superiority” for the duration of the Exhibition. The racist coverage of West Africa in the press, he wrote, was exactly the kind of “unthinking intolerance” that would undermine the “good work of philanthropic European ancestors,” and would destroy “the work of the present British Administrators and missionaries.” And, he added, it would be a sad outcome if the many Africans who traveled to England for the Exhibition filled with “high feelings and opinions of Britain and the British people” were not “spared the shock of a rude awakening,” that is, how some Britons treated Africans. “Given equal opportunity,” he concluded, “an African can hold his own with any race. Let us all remember that thrice happy is he who unselfishly passes on light he has received from another.”¹¹³

The Union of Students of African Descent held a series of meetings in London in response to the press coverage to which they invited “West African notables then in the country, including Dr James Aggrey and Dr. C. C. Adeniyi-Jones, member of Nigeria’s Legislative Council.”¹¹⁴ Hakim Adi suggests the meetings became a forum for “wide ranging debate over the future of West Africa, the issues facing the West African students, and the need for West Africans in Britain to form their own independent organisations.” The USAD, which represented the opinions of African men and women students in London (though women were in the minority), passed a resolution denouncing

¹¹³ Soetan, “Africans and Britons,” 445.

¹¹⁴ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 25.

the offensive and racist articles, drawings and photographs that they claimed ridiculed “citizens of countries whose money has been voted in large sums for the purpose of the exhibition.”¹¹⁵ The Union directed the resolution to the Colonial Secretary, J. H. Thomas, asking the Colonial Office to pressure Exhibition authorities to keep journalists from invading the privacy of West African workers, “or for seeing that those permitted to see them in their village in the walled city are capable of the decencies of ordinary conduct.”¹¹⁶ The resolution was also published in *West Africa* and, demonstrating the students’ political savvy, copies were sent to West African newspapers, the Prince of Wales, the President of the Empire Exhibition, West African governors, and Lord Beaverbrook, the proprietor of the *Sunday Express*.¹¹⁷ The Colonial Office argued that it could not control the press and “were reluctant to take any direct action on the matter.”¹¹⁸ Governor Guggisberg and the Exhibition’s publicity council, after much prodding from the students, took some steps to “prevent the publication of further derogatory articles.”¹¹⁹

At this time, *West Africa* was under the editorial direction of Mr. Albert Cartwright. According to an administrator at the Colonial Office, Cartwright was sympathetic to West African students, and, he added, did “not hold with such colour prejudice.”¹²⁰ Writing about Roland Hayes’ musical tour in England in 1921, Jeffrey

¹¹⁵ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 25.

¹¹⁷ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 25. Beaverbrook, a Canadian by birth, was known as the “Baron” of Fleet Street. He founded the *Sunday Express* and owned the *London Evening Standard*. He was also helped revive the pro-empire paper the *Daily Express* whose slogan was “For King and Empire.” Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialist*, 259-60.

¹¹⁸ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 26.

¹¹⁹ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 26.

¹²⁰ Memo to Major Ruston, July 4, 1930. CO 232/1078/13 Education, African Students in the U.K., 1930. Albert Cartwright was the editor of *West Africa* from 1917 to 1945. *West Africa* was established in 1917.

Green describes Cartwright as “a white associate of Britain’s black community . . . [who] moved easily in the circles frequented by Imperial officials in Britain, visiting black and white worthies, traders, students, and politicians.”¹²¹ African students identified Cartwright as a “good friend” and ally in the press.¹²² *West Africa* was read by Africans and Europeans. Both contributed to the paper in the form of articles and letters. J. E. Casely Hayford described the paper as “devoted to West African interests” and a “notable exception” within the English press in its efforts to correct the “wrong impression” about Africa.¹²³ It was generally supportive of West African students, as demonstrated in its coverage of the student protest. Throughout the interwar period, it published student letters and provided (for the most part) positive coverage of their activities in London.

West Africa’s reasons for supporting West African students, however, were not entirely benevolent or benign. They were driven in part at least by the knowledge West Africa was “of great importance to Britain, politically and commercially.”¹²⁴ The paper supported the dual mandate system, proclaiming it the “joint enterprise” model of colonialism. The paper’s proprietor, the Elder Dempster Shipping Limited, one of the most powerful commercial enterprises in West Africa, had an incentive to promote a positive image of West Africa in the paper.¹²⁵ Regardless of the exact motives behind the

“The journal carried reports of activities in the various territories of West Africa; listed arrivals and departures at British ports; carried advertising of trade goods, commercial services, and business opportunities; and included as well wide-ranging social and political news likely to be of interest to a black and white readership in Britain and in Africa.” Jeffrey P. Green, “Roland Hayes in London, 1921,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 10, 1 (Spring 1982), 29-42.

¹²¹ Green, “Roland Hayes in London, 1921,” 31.

¹²² *Wasu* 4, 4 (October 1935), 61.

¹²³ J. E. Casely Hayford, “Nationalism as a West African Ideal,” *Wasu* 2 (December 1926), 25.

¹²⁴ “Manners Makyth-Empire,” 1.

¹²⁵ Hakim Adi argues that West Africa was owned by Elder Dempster. I haven’t located evidence to confirm this. The company’s advertisement dollars would certainly have influenced the paper’s pro-trade model of empire. Furthermore, Elder Dempster owned *Elder Dempster Magazine* and Nigeria’s largest circulation daily paper the *Nigerian Daily Times*; and, according to Sherwood, other periodicals which

paper's support of West African students, *West Africa* ran several articles on their protest including a front page editorial admonishing the *Sunday Express* and other papers for broadcasting their ignorance, which was deemed "regrettable," and for the more disheartening offense of their having failed to "render simple due politeness to a fellow-community of the Empire."¹²⁶ The paper interpreted such "ignorance" in certain sections of the press as "a kind of vindication of the British people." It could "scarcely see how it can be seriously maintained that aggressive imperialism can exist side by side" with such ignorance of the "simplest" facts of African geography and life.¹²⁷ It argued that the British press as well as the Colonial Office (by continuing to "lump" all people of African descent together as "'natives' as if they were a mass of primitive people all at the same stage of development") had completely lost sight of West Africa's "great importance to Britain, politically and commercially" to the Empire.¹²⁸

West Africa argued that the situation in West Africa was much "simpler" than in India and, the newspaper proclaimed, "the African has a real liking for British institutions, British methods." However, the "average African" also had a "real sense of

focused on West Africa in the united Kingdom. It is possible that *West Africa* was among them. Sherwood also mentions that the company had so many holdings that many were unknown or did not claim a connection to Elder Dempster. The company was started by imperialist Alfred Jones at the end of the nineteenth century. It quickly grew into a major shipping company in West Africa and found the first bank in the region, the British Bank of West Africa (BBWA), the bank of the government and the only bank in the region until 1916 with the arrival of Barclay's bank. The chairman to the BBWA, interestingly, was Lord Milner, a major player in dominion rights movement and commonwealthism. The company was past to Lord Kyslant in 1909 at the time of Jones' death. Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 47, note 12. For additional information on Elder Dempster see Ayodeji Olukoju, "Elder Dempster and the Shipping Trade of Nigeria during the First World War," *The Journal of African History* 33, 2, (1992), 255-271; Ayodeji Olukoju, *The "Liverpool" of West Africa: The Dynamics and Impact of Maritime Trade in Lagos, 1900-1950* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004); Marika Sherwood, "Elder Dempster and West Africa 1891-C.1940: The Genesis of Underdevelopment?," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30, 2 (1997), 253-276; and P. N. Davies, *The Trade Makers: Elder Dempster in West Africa, 1852-1972* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973).

¹²⁶ "Manners Makyth-Empire," 1.

¹²⁷ "Manners Makyth-Empire," 1.

¹²⁸ "Manners Makyth-Empire," 1.

what is due to his own dignity and rights and standing” and was not likely to accept this kind of disrespect from the press.¹²⁹ The paper urged Exhibition authorities, the Governor of the Gold Coast and other high officials on visit in London to “protect British Africans” from further “outrageous” acts. Their defense of West Africans, the paper argued, was “especially pertinent in view of the fine tribute paid by Sir Hugh Clifford this week to the Gold Coast soldiers’ services in the Great War.”¹³⁰

As this example illustrates, the post-war British press provided a space in which Africans could respond to racist constructions of Africa and work toward altering their status within the Empire. The African students’ protest of the press coverage showed the students engaging with British representations of Africa and also asserting their authority to speak on behalf of the continent. Solanke and Soetan used the British press to air their grievances, to correct misunderstandings and representations about Africa, and to discuss the racism and hypocrisy that surrounded the Empire Exhibition. The related protest carried out by USAD through meetings and resolutions marked the beginning of a longer story of West African students’ political engagements and imperial citizenship in London during the interwar period. The Exhibition was an opportunity for imperialists to publicize their “empire” and for conservatives to push for Empire Free Trade. For African students it was more than the chance to discuss the paradoxical nature of British imperialism—it set the stage for the development of a pointed and ambitious anti-colonial imperial project to redefine Africa in London. This was an especially opportune moment for West African students to launch a more aggressive political campaign in the heart of the British Empire.

¹²⁹ “Manners Makyth-Empire,” 1.

¹³⁰ “Manners Makyth-Empire,” 1.

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West Africa, the Empire, and the World

The West Africa Students' Union was formed just months after the opening of the Empire Exhibition of 1924, in August of 1925 at the private residence of Ladipo Solanke in Bayswater, London. The Union was co-founded by Dr. H. G. Bankole-Bright from Sierra Leone and by Ladipo Solanke.¹³¹ African students from the four British colonies in West Africa attended the foundational meeting. Early members included J. Akanni Doherty, R. S. Blay, Davidson Carol, C. F. Hayfron-Benjamin, Kusika Roberts, Otto During, M. H. Siffre, H. J. Lightfoot Boston, Omoliyi Coker, J. Lazarus Minnow, R. A. Doherty, J. B. Danquah, Ladipo Solanke, J. W. de Graft Johnson, and Julius Ojo-Cole. The main speaker was Bankole-Bright who was no longer a student, but was part of an earlier cohort who had studied in the United Kingdom during the 1910s. His talk focused on the activities of his colleagues in the colonies, namely the political agenda of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) founded in Accra in 1920 by J. E. Casely Hayford.¹³² The NCBWA lobbied for the progressive movement towards West

¹³¹ Solanke played an important role in the student protest the year before and shortly afterward he established the Nigerian Progress Union in London with the help of thirteen other Nigerian students in London and Amy Ashwood Garvey who contacted Solanke after reading his letters of protest in the newspaper. Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 28.

¹³² In his early writing, J. E. Casely Hayford was influenced by W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Edward Blyden, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, and many others. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound*, 2.

African nationhood and independence within a reformed imperial framework. A united West Africa (led by intellectuals with the assistance of chiefs), it argued, “would be much more effective in exerting pressure on the British Government for political and other concessions than [would] each territorial organisation working in isolation.”¹³³ Bankole-Bright, a member of NCBWA, encouraged the students to join forces with the Congress and advance its political project in Great Britain.

The NCBWA was shaped by the changing political situation in the West African colonies after the war. Trained mainly in law and history, this earlier cohort of university-educated men fashioned themselves as the future leaders of their respective countries by publishing books on African customary law, history, languages and culture, and by actively participating in the construction of a “traditional” Africa. The colonial governments benefited substantially from their relationship with this cohort of educated elite. During and after the First World War, however, the colonial governments began to rely less on educated Africans and more on African chiefs as they institutionalized indirect rule. Indirect rule authorized African chiefs as the “authentic” voice and “natural rulers” of the region. This shift was accompanied by a discourse on the negative consequences of westernization and the “denationalization” of educated Africans that suggested that too much education and westernization threatened the “preservation” of a “traditional” and “authentic” Africa. Colonial authorities described university-educated Africans as “denationalized,” and argued that this group, owing to their western education, could no longer lay claim to an “authentic” African identity and culture. By the end of the 1920s, western-educated Africans were struggling to compete for a limited

¹³³ G. O. Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union and the Politics of Decolonisation, 1925-1958* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1982), 6.

number of government appointments available in the colonies. The NCBWA's response was to propose a future outside the colonial situation as a West African nation. The nation it imagined was not part of the colonial structure, but fit within a reformed imperial structure that would have allowed the educated group to achieve self-government.

Initially, WASU stayed true to the goals of the NCBWA and promoted unity among the students from the four colonies and helped to advance its political agenda in the metropole. Not long after its founding, however, the Union cultivated its own expression of West African nationalism and political aspirations that were similar to, but independent from those of the NCBWA. Using other colonial student clubs, primarily the oldest example, the Indian Students' Association, as models, WASU adopted formal rules of conduct and had initiation rites, an annual subscription fee, a club motto, magazine, and eventually an African hostel. *Wasu* magazine and the WASU Hostel were especially important to the Union's political goals. The students used the magazine to represent a West African public opinion in London, to educate the British public and West Africans about the region, and to encourage a sense of unity and nationhood among WASU members. The WASU hostel, founded in 1933, was evidence of self-help and a symbol of West Africa's autonomy within the Empire. It was also a key site of exchange between educated Africans, and helped the students establish a West African presence in London. The students used the hostel to socialize with colonial officials and Members of the British Parliament. They also used it to host dinners and dances in honor of special guests from the U.S. and Africa, and to hold public lectures.

WASU's political philosophy and practices were informed by earlier cohorts of African students who were members of USAD and the APU, and as seen in the example of the student protest of the press coverage of the West Africa section at Wembley, who had learned how navigate imperial, national and colonial structures. Like the USAD and the APU, WASU members sent letters to British and West African newspapers and lobbied the Colonial Office. They made connections with other organizations in London, including the Racial Relations Group, the Peoples' Common Law Parliament, the National Union of Students, the International Youth Council in Britain, the British Centre for Colonial Freedom, and the League of Coloured Peoples and World Council.¹³⁴ At different points in the club's history, the students formed connections with the Fabian Colonial Bureau, the Labour Party, and the League Against Imperialism.¹³⁵ WASU also sent representatives to international conferences, especially the international youth conferences popular after the war, including the Liverpool International Youth Movement for peace, the British Fellowship of Youth International Conference, and the Hague International Conference.¹³⁶ WASU's participation in these conferences put it into contact with "youth" groups from around the globe and offered the club opportunities to present Africa to a wider audience.

Previous studies of WASU have discussed the Union as a "training ground" for the future leaders of the nationalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s.¹³⁷ While it is true that many members, including J. B. Danquah, Kwame Nkrumah, J. W. de Graft-Johnson, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Milton Margai, H. J. Lightfoot Boston, H. O. Davies, and Eyo

¹³⁴ Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union*, 39.

¹³⁵ Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union*, 39.

¹³⁶ Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union*, 39.

¹³⁷ Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union*; Adi, *West Africans in Britain*.

Ita went on to lead independence movements, it is important to value the club as a product of the particular place and time in which it was formed. WASU was established at a time when people from around the world were exploring the role that they or members of their group would play within an emergent new world order. The time was ripe, the students argued, for Africa to make its appearance on the world stage. The students argued that it was their “duty” to translate the “African mind” to the world. WASU was the primary vehicle through which this project was carried out. It was, therefore, more than a training ground; it functioned as a site of exchange, knowledge production and political experimentation. It led its members in many exciting directions and introduced them to an assortment of resources and ideas for ways to build connections between themselves and other European and non-European groups. Through WASU, members tapped into imperial, black international, anti-colonial, and other political networks and participated in world-wide debates on issues of race, empire, nation, and citizenship.

During the interwar period, WASU argued for “rapid advance” towards modern self-governance within the Empire.¹³⁸ As Bernard Porter points out, this was a period “when most of the world was controlled by empire of one kind or another”; the choice, therefore, was not “between imperial rule and national independence,” but “between different kinds of imperial control: predatory and not predatory, bad and good.”¹³⁹ After the war, the “kindly British empire” was possibly “the next best bet” to Germany or the

¹³⁸ Garigue, “The West African Students’ Union,” 57.

¹³⁹ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialist*, 279.

“capitalistic-imperialists who would not scruple to see the native Africans turned labourers.”¹⁴⁰

WASU located their nationalist movement within the broader context of imperial reform. WASU’s vision of a reformed empire was based on a commonwealth or British “League of Nations” composed of self-governing nations each with their own laws, customs, and nationalities. According to this model, each country entered into the “family of nations” voluntarily. Unlike the commonwealth model presented by dominion nationalists, WASU’s commonwealth included all territories within the British Empire. Within this vision of a reformed empire, WASU argued that West Africa’s national development was part of the “larger Imperial programme.”¹⁴¹

West African students, however, could not afford to wait for imperial reform. During the interwar period they began the process of developing an anti-colonial West African nation that could eventually join a reformed empire and participate in international affairs as “West Africans.” In his first letter as President of WASU, J. B. Danquah wrote, “*Let us think big*; let our programme of development aim at a wider expansion of our activity in industry, in commerce, in business generally, no less than in culture.”¹⁴² As Philip Garigue notes in his study of WASU, from its founding “the Union reflected not so much the life of African students in London as their aspirations for the future of West Africa.”¹⁴³ The path to the future, according to WASU’s longtime Secretary Ladipo Solanke, were the three R’s—“Restoration, Regeneration and Rise;

¹⁴⁰ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialist*, 279; ADE, “Great Britain and the Negro Race: A Moral Responsibility,” *Wasu* 6 and 7 (August 1928), 17-18; and Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 29.

¹⁴¹ J. B. Danquah, “Forward,” *United West Africa (or Africa) at the Bar of the Family of Nations* (supplement) *Wasu* 5 (September 1927), 5.

¹⁴² J. B. Danquah, “The President’s Letter,” *Wasu*, 1, March 1926, 4.

¹⁴³ Philip Garigue, “The West African Students’ Union: A Study in Culture Contact,” *Africa Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures* 23, 1 (1953), 57.

alias West Africa in Future.”¹⁴⁴ Restoration involved historical recovery and education about Africa’s past. Regeneration entailed translating Africa’s past into the present, combining it with lessons learned from other societies to create a usable “West Africa,” that is, a modern culture and identity that would see its “rise” to progress. Following the three “R’s” required the complete overhaul of “Africa” in the western political and cultural imagination; it was this ambitious political and cultural vision that ultimately set WASU apart from the NCBWA and other African student groups.

Solanke’s *United West Africa (or Africa) at the Bar of the Family of Nations*, published in the *Wasu* magazine in 1927, offers additional insight into WASU’s project. A collection of lectures Solanke presented to different audiences in Great Britain, *United West Africa* is a repackaging of these lectures for a world audience. Each lecture focused on different aspects of African history and culture and sought to vindicate the “African point of view” in the broader context of the world.¹⁴⁵ Solanke presented Africa as a prisoner at the bar seeking nationhood “before a tribunal composed of the nations of the world.”¹⁴⁶ Using several examples from African history, the book addressed misreading of slavery, religion, the status of African women, and polygamy and marriage in Africa and argued for Africa’s contribution to world history.¹⁴⁷ By placing African history within the context of the world and human history, Solanke shifted readers’ attention away from colonial and imperial concerns to focus on Africa’s “natural right” to practice self-help and develop into “its own” national “character.” The first step, according to

¹⁴⁴ Solanke, *United West Africa (or Africa) at the Bar of the Family of Nations* (supplement) *Wasu* 5 (September 1927), 7.

¹⁴⁵ “A Review,” *Wasu* 5 (September 1927), 23.

¹⁴⁶ “A Review,” *Wasu* 5 (September 1927), 24.

¹⁴⁷ Solanke’s evidence was based on his research of European accounts of Africa since the 18th century

Solanke, was education. Not the education of Africans in this instance, but the education of the world about Africa's past. The world needed to recognize Africa and Africans as historical people, to acknowledge Africans as participants in world progress, to appreciate their creativity and unique contributions to "the movement of world history," and to admire their strength and perseverance in the face of colonial oppression and race prejudice.¹⁴⁸

J. B. Danquah believed *United West Africa's* greatest achievement was not to be found in its advocacy of "Africans for the Africans," but in its discussion of "Africans and Humanity."¹⁴⁹ Similar to Solanke, Danquah approached post-war internationalism and national self-determination as resources that could be used to promote WASU's anti-colonial project to see the founding of a West African nation. In a review of Bolton Waller's *Paths to World-Peace*, he stressed Waller's point that "a League or 'Society' of Nations" meant the "recognition among men of the unity of the human race, the oneness of interests of all nations, and the brotherhood of all peoples of the earth."¹⁵⁰ World peace, he argued, hinged on the "economic and material progress" and "the development of science, knowledge, and religion" of all human societies. The League of Nations, therefore, would someday "develop into a society of all nations and peoples," including Africa.¹⁵¹

Using the discussion of national self-determination to their advantage, both Solanke and Danquah suggested that if a colonized West Africa could not achieve

¹⁴⁸ J. B. Danquah, "Forward," *United West Africa (or Africa) at the Bar of the Family of Nations* (supplement) *Wasu* 5 (September 1927), 5.

¹⁴⁹ J. B. Danquah, "Forward," *United West Africa (or Africa) at the Bar of the Family of Nations* (supplement) *Wasu* 5 (September 1927), 5.

¹⁵⁰ Bolton C. Waller, *Paths to World-Peace* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1926).

¹⁵¹ J. B. Danquah, "Peace and the League of Nations," *Wasu* 2 (December 1926), 35-38.

nationhood, then the *world* could not achieve true progress. They argued that educated Africans were best prepared to develop British West Africa into an independent (Anglophone) West African nation. Their experience and knowledge of Africa and the world empowered them with what Casely Hayford called the gift of “double sight and double hearing.”¹⁵² Occupying a liminal position between Africa and Europe, the so-called modern and traditional, educated urban Africans’ “double-sightedness” gave them the unique ability to recognize the valuable aspects of their own “culture” and history and to blend these with successful examples from other “cultures.” The project of writing Africa’s history and defining the practices and customs of each country, therefore, was at the top of WASU’s list.

The Union’s political project for Africa fell somewhere between Frantz Fanon’s discussion of the difference between proving a black civilization to “the white world” and demanding recognition of as a people whose history *is* world history. Its argument for African history as part of world history corresponds with Fanon’s “third stage” in which colonized intellectuals declare their legitimate place in the world through creating a historical past and place their history and culture alongside all world civilizations.¹⁵³ However, as we will see, their efforts to decolonize Africa, its past, present and future, did not follow a linear path, but moved among alternative strategies as the students responded and adapted to changing circumstances and opportunities.

Creatively appropriating and transforming the varied discourses that crisscrossed the British Empire (and especially London as its metropolitan center) during the interwar years, WASU members united behind three guiding principles: unity, co-operation and

¹⁵² J. E. Casely Hayford, “Nationalism as a West African Ideal,” *Wasu* 2 (December 1926), 24.

¹⁵³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 34, 130-132.

self-help. By looking at these three concepts, I aim to trace how concepts of national self-determination, commonwealthism, internationalism, co-operation and colonialism shaped the basic principles of WASU. Each of these principles involved WASU's transformation of existing imperialist discourses with the goal of furthering the gradual development of a respected and autonomous West African nation within the British Empire.

Unity

WASU borrowed techniques associated with post-war empire-building propaganda, including fairs, exhibitions, holidays, and inter-colonial sporting and cultural events. To achieve unity, West Africans needed to be well-educated about each of their four countries. Education, therefore, was another critical instrument used to spread “inter-colonial *esprit de corps*” in the colonies. It would enable “West Africans” to identify a set of shared goals and would cultivate national “feeling.” The Union urged African newspapers in British West Africa to publish news from the four countries, and suggested that inter-colonial education be a routine feature of Sunday school, “Youth” movements, and Boy Scout and Girl Guide Associations. WASU hoped that newspaper readers and schoolchildren throughout British West Africa would learn about the region and discover a shared history and identity through these different venues.¹⁵⁴ These types of nation building strategies helped cultivate a West African public sphere in Accra during the 1930s, and possibly also in other cities in British West Africa.

¹⁵⁴ E. O. Asafu-Adjaye, “Shall West Africa Co-operate?,” *Wasu* 1, March 1926, 10.

In London, *Wasu* magazine was the primary instrument through which WASU students educated one another about the distinctive characteristics of each country. On its pages they created a wealth of information about West African customs, art, music, history, and practices. These discussions allowed them to locate and develop common practices between the different countries and to label these as “West African.” Some examples of articles published during the interwar period include “Lifting the Veil,” “The Truth about the Gold Coast Marriage Customs,” “Music in the Protectorate of Sierra Leone,” “A Glimpse of Yoruba Civilisation,” “Yoruba (or Aku) Constitutional Law,” as well as pen portraits of “famous Africans” including Kobina Sekyi, Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Bankole-Bright, and King Prempeh II.¹⁵⁵ Next to these country-specific articles were essays on West African nationalism, such as “Shall West Africa Co-operate?,” “Nationalism as a West African Ideal,” “West Africa and the World,” “The West African Student and Medicine,” and “West Africa in Evolution.”¹⁵⁶ Other articles probed “into the mysteries of the knowledge of our great ancestors” and helped retrieve from “decay and oblivion the best elements of our ancestral civilisation.”¹⁵⁷ *Wasu* also provided regular news coverage about events in each of the four countries compiled into a single section entitled “News and Notes.”

¹⁵⁵ Solanke, *Wasu* 1, March 1926, 11-15; R. S. Blay, *Wasu* 2, December 1926, 20-23; M. A. S. Margai, *Wasu* 2, December 1926, 38-41; Julius Ojo Cole, *Wasu* 3 and 4, March and June 1927, 16-19; Solanke, *Wasu* 1, 9, December 1932, 21-25; C. Kessie, *Wasu* 1, 9, December 1932, 25-27; Olu Alakija, *Wasu* 2, 1, January 1933, 10-11; C. Kessie “Pen Portrait of Dr. Bakole-Bright,” *Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933); and C. Kessie, “Pen Portrait of King Prempeh II,” *Wasu* 2, 1 (March 1934), 14.

¹⁵⁶ Asafu-Adjaye, *Wasu* 1 (March 1926); J. E. Casely Hayford, *Wasu* 2 (December 1926); Abiola Akiwumi, *Wasu* 2, December 1926; Solanke, *Wasu* 5, September 1927, supplement; W. A. Nanka Bruce, *Wasu* 6 and 7, August 1928, 33-35; and R. B. Cole, *Wasu* 2, 2, April to June 1933, 30-35.

¹⁵⁷ J. Akanni Doherty, “The President’s Letter: Unity and the Path to Progress,” *Wasu* 5 (September 1927), 5.

In their research and writing, the students went to great lengths to find commonality between their different countries at the same time as they demonstrated the uniqueness of each. Photographs of members were always accompanied by the name of their home country. However, it is important to note that while ethnic customs and practices were discussed, they were always presented as part of the overall social and cultural fabric of a country. Emphasis was placed on national identities. National identities fit comfortably within the students' vision of a united West Africa, and were also anti-colonial insofar as they countered the colonial government's push for ethnicity and ethnic divisions through indirect rule—a project that the students objected to. The students' efforts to found a general “West African” identity demanded that they negotiate ethnic, religious, and geographical differences (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Thus far, I have focused on the magazine's role within the student and West African community; however, *Wasu* was published with a much larger audience in mind. The students saw the magazine as an opportunity to fulfill their “duty” to “investigate and give to the world in suitable literary form, an account of their history, laws, customs, institutions and languages” and thereby “making a definitely African contribution towards the progress of civilization.”¹⁵⁸ They sent complementary copies of the magazine to the Colonial Office and the British Museum and even sold issues through news agents in New York City. In 1935, Dr. J. D. Kole, Psy.D., M.B.P.L., a lecturer in Yoruba language in New York, reported having sold every issue the Union had sent him

¹⁵⁸ Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union*, 1982, 19; *West Africa*, August 15, 1925, 1002.

that fall. The Universal Ethiopian Students' Association was another New York distributor.¹⁵⁹ *Wasu* was also available throughout British West Africa.

In addition to informing the world about West Africa, the magazine editors sought to inform West African students about the world. They followed Gandhi's movement in India, cocoa prices in the colonies, the politics of land ownership in Kenya, the Scottsboro trial in the U.S., the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy, the rise of Nazism in Germany, and the activities of the Labour Party in England. The worldliness of their magazine, combined with its pointed coverage of "African" history and civilization, they felt, provided evidence of Africa's distinctiveness and cultural and intellectual independence from Britain along with its cosmopolitanism.

Another example of nation building was "WASU Day," the Union's "West African National Day," celebrated annually during the month of October. The students described the holiday as one of joy mingled with sorrow; joy on account of the milestone they had reached in their struggle to "relinquish the status of the underdog," and sorrow because they still had a long way to go as well as the "numerous and almost insurmountable difficulties yet to encounter and subdue."¹⁶⁰ It was a day when "every West African" would be persuaded to contemplate the problems that confronted the "nation," and would ask what they could do to contribute to its progress.¹⁶¹

The holiday was celebrated in London and among members of the WASU branches throughout West Africa, in the Belgian Congo, and in New York City. WASU

¹⁵⁹ The magazine reported that their older agent, the Universal Ethiopian Students' Association had failed to send returns for various issues and publications sent to them "for sale and distribution among our American cousins and friends." Dr. Higgins, a patron of the Association, on a recent visit to the Hostel promised the union that he would pressure the Association to make good on their returns. *Wasu* 4, 5 (November 1935), 76.

¹⁶⁰ "WASU Day, An Appeal," *Wasu* 4, 4 (October 1935), 58.

¹⁶¹ "WASU Day, An Appeal," 58.

branches organized dances and other festivities that were reportedly attended by African chiefs, clerks, and professionals. As part of the celebration in Ijebu-Ode, Nigeira, supporters of WASU sang I. O. Ransome-Kuti's "African poem on Co-operation." The following stanza illustrates the kind of spirit they hoped the holiday would inspire,

If we would only unite together,
If we would only serve together,
When to the Saviour's presence we're usher'd,
Happiness shall be ours together.¹⁶²

The London celebration involved similar activities in addition to a picnic, dance and the "Ogboni ceremony of unity and co-operation." The event was advertised in British and West African newspapers and attracted a mixed crowd that included Africans, West Indians, African Americans, and Europeans.¹⁶³

WASU Day was a clever appropriation of Empire Day. On a symbolic level, it recognized West African unity as critically important to imperial unity. Far from conflicting, the *Times of West Africa* in Accra reported on both holidays with equal excitement (although Empire Day was a larger and better publicized event owing to its celebration in schoolhouses all over the country). WASU branches sent post-event reports on the day's proceedings along with donations to the Union, all of which were recorded in *Wasu* magazine.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² I. O. Ransome-Kuti, "African Poem on Co-operation," *Wasu* 1, 9 (December 1932).

¹⁶³ In 1934, WASU's patron Paul Robeson, his friends, and a large number of European guests were in attendance. The celebration in 1935 attracted a "much larger number of both the West Indian and the African students" than in previous years. *Wasu* 4, 5 (November 1935), 74.

¹⁶⁴ The magazine published WASU Day returns from each participating WASU branch. "The Mother Union (London)" contributed eleven pounds, the Lagos Branch, thirteen, and the New York branch one. There are several other branches reported, totaling about fifty-one pounds. The Union was still waiting to hear from supporters in Gold Coast, parts of Nigeria, the Gambia, the Belgian Congo, New York City, and Sierra Leone. In addition to WASU Day, the union launched a second fundraising holiday called the

WASU's unifying campaigns went a long way towards creating a sense of West African unity and identity both in London and in the colonies. *Wasu* was one of the primary locations within which the details of West Africa were actively worked through and processed, while WASU Day served as an annual reminder of their efforts to unite. However, even the most dedicated of WASU members would have found it challenging, if not counter-productive, to their own country-specific nation building goals to place too much emphasis on a unifying West African nationalism at home. During the 1930s, many returning students found themselves juggling different identities as they catered to chiefs, European firms, and British administrators. After Casely Hayford's death in 1930, there were attempts to revive the NCBWA and its principles in Accra, but these were short-lived. And while they discussed West Africa in the press, and even named newspapers after it, the focus of the university-educated group, at least in Accra, was the bolstering of their authority within the local context, and this meant shoring up their identity as leaders of Gold Coast "society" and "opinion" vis-à-vis locally-educated men and women, African chiefs, and colonial administrators. As they claimed seats on the Legislative Council and took part in municipal affairs, they did so as educated Africans from the coastal area of the Gold Coast.

And, yet, the national identities they developed were not entirely disconnected from WASU's political project. Country-specific nationalisms were part of the students' larger project to create a strong united nation of West Africa. WASU's unity building campaigns were certainly helpful in this respect. Returning students and former WASU

"African Hostel Foundation Day," a great yearly feast that falls on January 1st. The purpose was to bring all people of African descent into one location for a celebration of unity and co-operation. *Wasu* 4, 5 (November 1935), 75-6.

members celebrated WASU Day, founded or joined existing branches, and promoted inter-colonial learning and co-operation through their newspapers. For many members in the colonies, West African unity was still seen as an effective political strategy for bypassing the colonial system and creating a more powerful presence in the Empire and world. West Africanism, while compromised at times, remained essential to this cohort's political projects as they returned to their home countries.

Co-operation

Co-operation, a more outwardly-focused principle, referred to the Union's vision for how a united West Africa would fit into the British Empire. WASU's interpretation of co-operation borrowed from a full spectrum of arguments addressing and presenting a unique case for a "co-operative" relationship between West Africa and Britain. The students were attracted to the discourse of co-operative relations between Africans and Britain. This model was different from the colonial model of self-other that assumed a singular subject, that is, an omnipotent colonizer and its Other.¹⁶⁵ The co-operative model allowed for the possibility of two autonomous groups, African and British, working in relationship with each other towards independent and shared goals.

¹⁶⁵ Jessica Benjamin has discussed omnipotence as a "mental state" of "undifferentiation" and the foundation of psychological violence. Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 86. See Fanon's discussion of the "empire of the same." The self-other divide in the colonial situation is a false one; for Fanon there is only one actor in the relationship, the colonizer, as the "other" is merely a production of who he is not. Fuss, *Identification Papers*, 144-146.

For the Union, co-operation, in the “widest sense of the term” meant “conscientious mutual help.” The co-operative political system they imagined was a voluntary contract between independent nations. Each nation would contribute to the “good of the social body,” and in return could expect political and economic benefits. If the social body was no longer advancing the cause of an individual nation, or if the goals of that nation changed, the nation (as with all member countries) had the right to declare its independence from the social body. “The basic principles of this creed may be summed up in the phrase, ‘each for all and all for each.’”¹⁶⁶

As mentioned, co-operation became a popular idea among proponents of imperial reform after the First World War. In the West African colonies, the concept became the cornerstone of government and commercial projects to maintain “friendly” and economically productive relationships between Africans and Europeans on the coast and, as we will see, it was further transformed by West African students in the service of their own political goals. European entrepreneurs used the term to advocate a “co-operative” economic relationship between African and European merchants that they called the “joint enterprise.” The joint enterprise positioned the colonial government as a kind of (irksome) mediator between Africans and European business owners that allegedly inhibited the development of a true joint enterprise with regulations and ordinances (many set up to protect African’s control over the land). By lobbying for the joint enterprise European firms sought to deal directly with Africans in achieving their economic goals.

¹⁶⁶ E. O. Asafu-Adjaye, “Shall West Africa Co-operate?,” *Wasu* 1, March 1926, 8.

Men like Sir Alfred Jones and his partner Mr. Wm. Davey who started the Elder Dempster Shipping Lines and the British Bank of West Africa were pioneers in this realm of thinking and their industries were both beneficial to and potentially threatening to the colonial government. The British Bank of West Africa, for example, absorbed the Bank of Nigeria and, for many years was the Colonial Bank's main competitor.¹⁶⁷ Western-educated West Africans, many of whom came from coastal families with long histories of trade with European companies, would have been familiar with the idea of their home countries as sites of competition and conquest—European and African merchants, Christian missionaries, African chiefs and lawyers, and British colonials all competing for control over land and resources. Provided this history, West African students and professionals might have seen themselves as another group of West African “visionaries,” like Sir Alfred Jones or Lugard, presenting their own ideas about how the region ought to be developed and governed.

Their use of co-operation, though, was drawn mainly from imperial reformers who, as discussed earlier in this chapter, were themselves integrating the international discussion of co-operation into their own thinking about empire. A second source came from Lugard's dual mandate, which proposed a different kind of co-operative model between Britain and Africa. Seizing and blending these different interpretations of the concept, in 1926 J. B. Danquah wrote,

Britain has declared herself ready to co-operate with us for the progress of our country and people. We welcome the co-operation. The intention is noble, the issues may be involved and complex, but let us make it our duty to see that the

¹⁶⁷ Leo Weintal, “Sir Alfred: Some Memories of a Great Mersey Man,” *Elder Dempster Magazine* (June 1922), 48.

intention to co-operate with us should fall on fruitful soil. Co-operation means unity, unity means identity of interests. In so far as it is possible to have community of interests with our trustees, in so far should we strive to apply the best fruits obtainable by us, as beneficiaries, to the service of our country.¹⁶⁸

WASU's interpretation and application of co-operation, however, contrasted sharply with these other uses, particularly with the Colonial Office and its advocacy of co-operation. The Colonial Office discussed co-operation within the context of indirect rule, that is, it sought co-operation between a "traditional" African chieftaincy and a "modern" British colonial administration. When the Colonial Office spoke of co-operation, therefore, they did so in relation to their own political project (indirect rule); co-operation from this perspective was not meant to be applied to the relationship between the colonial government and the western-educated men who wished to replace them. WASU's clever appropriation and adaptation of co-operation demonstrates the political creativity and inventiveness of this group. By using the term, the students suggested that the Colonial Office and British Government were ready and willing to co-operate on behalf of the progress of "West Africa," which they took to mean the advancement of its "nationhood." At the same time, they appealed to the imperialist and capitalist visions of co-operation, that is, they appropriated imperial discourses to reframe their position within an imperial framework.

¹⁶⁸ J. B. Danquah, "The President's Letter," *Wasu*, 1, March 1926, 3.

Self-Help

As reflected in the words of the Irish-born Governor of Sierra Leone, Samuel W. Blackall, ““there is but one way in which Africa can be advanced, and that is by the honesty, industry, and well-directed energy of the Africans themselves.””¹⁶⁹ WASU appropriated this self-help philosophy to argue that only Africans could lead West Africa to nationhood. African self-help, the students argued, would lead to real and lasting progress in the region and was the primary ingredient in the creation of a genuinely co-operative relationship between Africa and Britain.

WASU’s founding of the African Students’ Hostel in London is an example of self-help for this cohort of students and a powerful symbol of their vision for “West Africa in Future.” For several years, African students encountered difficulties in obtaining affordable accommodations in London. Rather than wait for the Colonial Office to open a hostel for them, the students launched a fundraising “mission” in West Africa to support their own hostel. A difficult task, the students raised over a thousand pounds from among their home communities and opened the first African-funded and managed student hostel in Great Britain. They celebrated the hostel, which opened its doors in 1933, as material evidence of West Africa’s determination and self-reliance in creating an African “home away from home” in the heart of the British Empire.¹⁷⁰

The mission was a fundraising tour as well as an advertising campaign for WASU in the colonies. On October 9, 1929, Ladipo Solanke, the Union’s “Missioner,” boarded

¹⁶⁹ “Editorial Notes,” *Wasu*, 1, March 1926, 2. Blackall was the Governor of Sierra Leone between 1862 and 1865.

¹⁷⁰ The letter writer, Mr. Fashule Luke, M.B., Ch.b. (Edin.), D.T.M. (L’pool), L.M. (Dub.), was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. He found the atmosphere at the Hostel comfortable and full of inspired brotherhood. He also wrote that it was conveniently located and the African foodstuffs available made his visit all the more enjoyable. J. F. Luke, Letter to the Editor, *Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933), 12.

an Elder Dempster passenger ship (on credit with the company) armed with the “Mission Statement” that explained WASU’s project and the role that the hostel played within it, along with several well-rehearsed lectures on “African Laws and Customs” and the “Land Question.” From the moment of his arrival at Freetown, Sierra Leone on October 18th, Solanke was well-received by former WASU members who helped to organize his speaking events and hosted dances in honor of his visit.

The mission involved his presentation of the mission statement in each town he visited followed by requests for funds. Public lectures and “propaganda in the interest of the Mission” dominated his work. In Accra, he “delivered the Mission” to all of the Paramount Chiefs assembled at the Provincial Council of Chiefs at Dodowah and Rodger Club members in Accra. In Nigeria, he delivered 1,000 addresses to “great and impressive” audiences in towns throughout the country and “greatly enhanced the popularity” of WASU and its plans for a hostel. At the end of each lecture a committee was organized to collect funds from the community and a large number of subscription books were distributed all over West Africa.

Solanke’s fundraising efforts targeted African chiefs. He encouraged chiefs to view their contributions to the hostel fund as a paternal gesture. In return, WASU praised contributors by name in their magazine and called them the official patrons of their hostel. In this way, WASU positioned African chiefs as wise fathers and themselves as the promising young sons and daughters of West Africa. The students routinely represented themselves as the “children of Africa,” as Africa’s bright and guiding light, and as Africa in the future. Through lectures, poems, private letters, and articles, members of the Union worked tirelessly to maintain the image of the student as the

future, as progress, which every member of the African community should support and nurture, and should “say to the children of Africa . . . go forward.”¹⁷¹ This narrative was meant to soothe what had the potential to be a competitive and strained relationship, but the underlying message remained—the chiefs must ultimately step aside to make room for the “future.”

In each country Solanke visited, he received the support of the local newspapers, which, he wrote, “willingly and readily left the columns of their esteemed journals open to any contributions from me and from all those interested in the Mission by way of advertising the Mission.”¹⁷² In the Gold Coast, “Marjorie Mensah” (a fictive newspaper personality created by African men and women writers of the Accra-based *West Africa Times*) devoted one of her columns to promoting the WASU Hostel.¹⁷³ Nigerian newspapers reported on all of his lectures and some published the mission statement. A Lagos newspaper commented on Solanke’s popularity, observing that 2,559 people attended his first public address at Glover Memorial Hall. While Solanke emphasized positive responses to the “Hostel Scheme,” he noted that it had provoked “criticisms and differences of opinions” in Nigeria. These opinions, he claimed, occupied a “considerable” amount of his time and dominated the local press in Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Kano, and Port Harcourt.

During his tour, Solanke also helped establish branches of WASU in nearly all the coastal towns and throughout Nigeria. WASU branches hosted lectures, debates, reading

¹⁷¹ Wasu 1, 9 (December 1932), 21.

¹⁷² Wasu 1, 9 (December 1932), 3.

¹⁷³ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *Times of West Africa*, October 11, 1932. Reprinted in *Wasu*, “What the Gold Coast People Said Recently about the W.A.S.U. Hostel Scheme,” *Wasu* 2, 1 (January 1933), 24-25.

groups, sporting events, concerts and dances. They also participated in the celebration of the anniversary of the “Parent Union, usually in the form of a well-organized Thanksgiving Service.”¹⁷⁴ *Wasu* magazine was delighted to print news from the branches, and declared it a sign of WASU “Brotherhood” in the region. It proudly reported that WASU members traveling from one town to another in West Africa received a warm welcome and practical support from the Union’s branches.¹⁷⁵ *Wasu* published news and information about the activities of each branch in addition to letters from WASU members.

Solanke reported only modest sums of money accompanied the outpouring of support he received in his home country. His efforts in the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone (he did not visit the Gambia) yielded similar results. Despite this, the mission was a success for many reasons. It publicized the Union and its goals in West Africa. It created a positive relationship between the chiefs and the students. And, it helped found new branches of WASU throughout the region, furthering the creation of critical connections between African students in London and former students in the colonies.

During the winter and spring of 1933, as the students prepared for the grand opening of their Hostel, *Wasu* featured lengthy articles replete with detailed descriptions of the Hostel’s floor plan and photographs and hopeful passages about its future renovation and events. The students were, naturally, immensely proud of their building at 62 Camden Road which they observed was “only about one hundred yards or a minute’s walk from the London Underground Station.”¹⁷⁶ It was centrally located,

¹⁷⁴ *Wasu* 1, 9 (December 1932), 11.

¹⁷⁵ *Wasu* 1, 9 (December 1932), 11.

¹⁷⁶ “W.A.S.U. Hostel,” *Wasu* 2, 1 (January 1933), 5-6.

rendering facilities to any part of London the students could possibly need to visit. It was minutes from the “Students’ Movement areas known as the Friend’s House on Euston Road, University College Gower Street, and Bloomsbury,” as well as to “Chancery Lane and Inns of Court,” King’s College, and the London School of Economics. And, it wasn’t more than a “penny ride” away from any number of popular tourist destinations including Piccadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace, the National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, Whitehall, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, the Thames, Westminster Cathedral, and the “famous” Russell Square and London Zoological Gardens. The building was perfectly suited in its capacity to bring Africa to its final “destination.” It had 18 “good” residence rooms, a large hall on the first floor, a billiard room, [and] a spacious kitchen with a “Bacchus’ room” (which the students planned to convert into some “useful purpose other than that of Bacchus”).¹⁷⁷ It had enough space for a library, reading room, game room, and guest rooms. The grounds surrounding the building, the students reported, could easily support a tennis courts, small garden, and restaurant where the students could buy “authentic” African meals.

During its opening days, the Hostel “joyously” received promises from West African chiefs in Gold Coast and Nigeria to help the students furnish the Hostel. WASU branches sent donations and West African newspapers publicized its cause. Depicting African women as supporters of men and their national aspirations, “Marjorie Mensah” encouraged women readers to do their part to raise funds for the Hostel and to “show our men their duty.” At the same time, she suggested that African men had a more active part to play in the hostel scheme and West African nationalism. She wrote, “whilst the

¹⁷⁷ “W.A.S.U. Hostel,” *Wasu* 2, 1 (January 1933), 5-6.

Wasu Hostel Scheme goes a-begging we cannot boast of being a generous people unless we want to be the laughing stock of the whole Empire.”¹⁷⁸ The Hostel was physical evidence of men’s self-help in London, and a testimony to men’s ability to unite, cooperate and succeed. Indeed, it was a powerful political statement about Africa’s future within the British Empire. As the fictive “Marjorie” noted, the “whole Empire” was watching as the students determinedly worked to create an African Home and Bureau of information in the “Metropolis of the Empire.”¹⁷⁹ African women in the colonies contributed to this project in London by reminding men that the WASU Hostel exemplified African self-help, and also served as an African “home away from home” in the heart of the Empire.

The Hostel was thus a symbol of Africa’s movement towards self-government and provided Africans (mainly men) a practical space within the Empire to live, study and socialize. An African student, “E. ITA,” writing from the United States described the Hostel as “a great achievement for West Africa.” Almost declaring the kind of autonomous African identity and co-operative relationship the students hoped to achieve with Great Britain, he continued,

The argument that was set up against its establishment, that it was destined to keep African students too African at this seat of learning is evidently frail when one sees the London atmosphere pervade the Hostel, even the remotest corner of its kitchen and refectory, while in the atmosphere the African spirit freely expresses itself, and the students keep the broader contact with the London life outside the Hostel.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Mensah, “What the Gold Coast People Said,” 25.

¹⁷⁹ *Wasu* 2, 2, (April-June 1933), 34.

¹⁸⁰ “E. ITA,” “Commentary on the Hostel,” Letter to Mr. Solanke, *Wasu* 2, 2, (April-June 1933), 1.

As this student reported, the Hostel was a way for Africans to creatively negotiate the relationship between Africa and Britain. The Hostel doors faced in two directions: one inviting London into Africa, to learn about its history and culture, and the other providing Africans with a way into London and the world.

The Hostel became a physical space in which African students could experiment with their identity as western-educated African men and where they could debate different cultural and philosophical ideas. Through their experimentations with a wide-range of perspectives in their quest to define West Africa, the students showed themselves not as “denationalized” Africans, but as blessed with the ability to combine multiple perspectives without losing an “essential” Africanness. The fluidity with which students moved between English and African identities, practices, and cultures was evidence of what Casely Hayford described as the gift of “double-sightedness” among western-educated Africans, that is, their intelligent and selective integration of usable cultural, economic, and philosophical resources from Europe and the world into their own political and cultural project. As “E. ITA” argued, “the African spirit freely expresses itself” as the students were taking full advantage of the opportunities available to them in the “seat of learning.”¹⁸¹

The Hostel was a concrete location in which to welcome guests from overseas and provide members with all the “amenities of a social club including a restaurant.”¹⁸² It housed meetings, dances, public lectures, reading and study groups, discussion circles, public debates, sporting events, mixers, African chiefs and African Americans during

¹⁸¹ “E. ITA,” “Commentary on the Hostel,” 1

¹⁸² “W.A.S.U. Special Address Presented to His Excellency Sir Bernard H. Bourdillon, K.C.M.G., K.B.E. (Governor of Nigeria), *Wasu* 1, 1 (January 1937), 15.

their travels to England. The Warden, Solanke, was assisted by “a very industrious typical African lady,” and by the end of January 1933, the Hostel was accepting visitors.¹⁸³ The first two were Messrs. M. J. Bruce, “a well-known figure of Gold Coast and Nigeria, and Mr. J. F. E. Einaar, a native Dutch Guiana, and now of Leyden University, Holland.”¹⁸⁴ Major Hanns Vischer of the Colonial Office made a visit during the middle of February 1933; after having “inspected the Hostel round” congratulated all of the students for “this great monument.” Several other people visited during its first winter, including the “traveller [*sic*], lecturer and great writer” Miss M. F. Perham; a West Indian Soprano Miss Alyce Fraser; the General Secretary of International Studies, Mr. G. Kingshot; a school teacher at Gladestone House, Miss G. Jones; and many others. The first resident of the Hostel was Prince Adegboyea Adetokunbo Ademola of Abeokuta, Nigeria followed by O. Taiwo Jibowu, Esq., Dr. S. E. Onwu, Ladipo Odunsi, Esq., and Dr. Jabez B. Fashule Luke.¹⁸⁵ After his stay at the Hostel, Luke sent a warm letter of gratitude for a “home away from home” in London. He was most impressed with the unity of “brotherhood” he witnessed at the Hostel and suggested that WASU’s example could inspire the unity of its “fellow brethren all over the world.”¹⁸⁶ While a small number of African women were part of this world in the 1930s and especially in the 1940s when it became more common for women to study abroad, as Luke’s and “Marjorie’s” comments on the Hostel suggest, the West African public sphere of London was dominated by men.

¹⁸³ The industrious lady was Mrs. Olu, Solanke’s wife. “The African Student’ Hostel,” *Wasu* 2, 2, (April-June 1933), 11.

¹⁸⁴ *Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933), 13.

¹⁸⁵ “The African Students’ Hostel,” *Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933), 11.

¹⁸⁶ J. F. Luke, “A Bouquet,” Letter to the Editor, *Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933), 12.

The Hostel became a kind of refuge for Africans and people of African descent (again, mainly men) studying in London and for people just passing through. The house also offered a small number of dormitory rooms for students at a time when finding accommodation that would accept Africans was extremely difficult. One of its aims was to provide students with comfortable accommodation at reasonable rates.¹⁸⁷ While in residence, the students could also expect to receive help from the Warden (Solanke) and other WASU members in planning their course of studies. The Hostel also served as a bureau of information for students in West Africa. Solanke encouraged young people to send their questions to the Hostel about how to get through the London Matriculation, Oxford Responses, Cambridge Preliminary or any other entrance examination. It also provided information on American colleges, business opportunities and the cost of living in England.¹⁸⁸

The Hostel provided students with numerous opportunities for meeting new people and hearing lectures by well-known scholars and public figures. Lecturers included Paul Robeson, Modupe Boderick, Alain Locke, Captain E. J. Langford Garston, M.C., and Nana Ofori Atta. During his visit to London in the mid 1930s, Nnamdi Azikiwe gave a series of talks at the Hostel. He described the Hostel as “the headquarters of most West African students in London, where we congregated and devoured West African newspapers.”¹⁸⁹ According to *Wasu*, the Hostel library and reading room that housed West African, African, and British newspapers, including the *Reynolds Illustrated News*, *African World*, *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, *Gold Coast Spectator*, *Gold Coast*

¹⁸⁷ “W.A.S.U. Special Address Presented to His Excellency Sir Bernard H. Bourdillon, K.C.M.G., K.B.E. (Governor of Nigeria), *Wasu* 1, 1 (January 1937), 15.

¹⁸⁸ *Wasu* 2, 2 (April-June 1933), 34.

¹⁸⁹ Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 197.

Independent, Gold Coast Guardian, Times of West Africa, Gold Coast Times, Akede Eko, Caribee (of Trinidad), and *The Tribune* (Guyana) was a popular space for students and guests.¹⁹⁰ The hostel, as this description suggests, was as much symbolic as it was a bold and active step towards demonstrating West African autonomy and securing recognition for their independence within the Empire.

When they opened their hostel, the students hoped that the Colonial Office would recognize their achievement and “co-operate” with them and their plans to keep the hostel afloat. Instead, the Colonial Office opened its own African student hostel, Aggrey House (named after the revered Gold Coast educationists to whom many of the WASU students admired and respected) in 1934. The Colonial Office’s decision to compete with the students by opening a second hostel in London and its use of Dr. Aggrey’s name to promote it must have seemed rather cruel. A year after its opening, the WASU hostel was struggling to stay open. Solanke had overestimated the funds he had collected during his tour, and the building required renovations and furniture. The well-funded Aggrey House could offer students more amenities and was a serious threat to the WASU Hostel.

By opening Aggrey House, the Colonial Office had completely dismissed the Union’s efforts to demonstrate African self-help. Aggrey House was also a public expression of the Office’s opinion that the WASU Hostel was not prepared to fulfill the needs of African students in the city. Did the Colonial Office’s competition with the students follow the spirit of co-operation? Was this an example of the “joint enterprise”? If so, WASU students wanted no part in it. Outraged by the Colonial Office’s opening of

¹⁹⁰ *Wasu* 2, 2, (April-June 1933).

a second hostel, the students formed a hostel defense fund and committee. They published pamphlets that explained why they believed Aggrey House posed a serious threat to African self-help and urged African students and all members of the European and African community to support the WASU Hostel over Aggrey House.

The struggle between WASU and the Colonial Office over the control of an African space in London is a long and complicated story that deserves more attention than I am able to devote to it here. It illustrates the meaning of the African-run Hostel for the students and its role as a physical representation of African political and economic self-help and autonomy within the Empire.¹⁹¹ If Indian students had two hostels in England and others in Paris and Berlin, and the “Chinese and the Egyptian Students [were] not a whit behind the Indians in this respect, *Wasu* argued, it was essential that West Africa also have a hostel.¹⁹² Ladipo Solanke saw the development of Indian nationhood as closely linked to their having an Indian Hostel in London. He argued that the Indian Hostel had effectively promoted unity and co-operation among the “heterogeneous tribes of India.” He hoped that an African Hostel would have a similar effect and could find no “reason why the African should not in this respect, take a leaf from his Oriental brethren with whom it is reputed he has a lot in common.”¹⁹³ The Hostel declared West Africa’s right (as part of the Empire) to establish roots in the

¹⁹¹ Aggrey House was a source of deep frustration for the WASU students; they worried that they would not be able to compete with Aggrey House and would have to close their own Hostel. This never happened, and, in fact, the WASU students (out of financial desperation and negotiation) agreed to co-operate with the Colonial Office in exchange for their partial financial support that would allow them to stay in business.

¹⁹² *Wasu* 1, 9 (December 1932), 20.

¹⁹³ Ladipo Solanke, “An Appeal—Need for a Central Home in London for African Students,” *Wasu* 6, 7 (August 1928), 33.

metropole. It was also a symbol of a “budding African Empire” in London and movement towards Africa’s autonomy and hopeful future.¹⁹⁴

Decolonizing Identity

“What, then, are the means to raise a struggling nation into a position of recognition by her coevals?”¹⁹⁵ This was the question that occupied the minds of West African students in London and encouraged them as they pursued their political goals through the West African Students’ Union. From the beginning, the students associated with WASU understood that they were unlikely to succeed with an argument for immediate self-government. Their alternative, therefore, was to find pockets within in the system—in the colonies and in the metropole—to carry out their self-help, education and efforts to unite with the idea of preparing West Africa for its eventual emancipation from colonial rule. To accomplish this, however, they needed to move outside the colonial framework and to decolonize African identity and culture. This meant the displacement of Britain as the only source of West Africa’s movement towards “modern progress.” The Union’s principles of unity, co-operation and self-help all worked towards this goal.

The first step in this process was to argue for nationhood outside the colonial framework. Their proposal for a united West Africa effectively moved the future of the region from the colonial into the imperial realm. The united West African nation WASU

¹⁹⁴ *Wasu* 1, 9 (December 1932), 13.

¹⁹⁵ J. B. Danquah, “The President’s Letter,” *Wasu* 1, March 1926, 4.

advocated was a modern political structure that bore no resemblance to the colonial government of indirect rule. Unlike indirect rule, they argued, their vision of a new West Africa was an “authentic” expression of African self-determination that was in dialogue with nationalist agendas around the world. And, like all “modern societies,” it was founded upon the principle of national self-determination. Each country that made up the whole of “West Africa” was encouraged to fulfill its own national destiny and, they argued, was “naturally” inclined towards intelligent co-operation with the others.

As West Africans, the students linked their nation’s welfare to the destiny of the British Empire at a critical time when it was being re-imagined in the aftermath of war. Casting their future within the imperial domain, the students created opportunities to lobby for resources unavailable at the colonial level and to develop arguments based on comparisons between their own circumstances and those of other territories within the Empire. The British Empire “built on blood and treachery,” WASU argued, could not “continue to exist on them.”¹⁹⁶ To avoid its own destruction, the Empire would have to adjust to the post-war world. Part of its adjustment was its support and recognition of West Africa’s rise to nationhood. WASU’s use of internationalism, in this case the discourse of national self-determination and co-operation, were attempts to bring “broadmindedness” to the Empire, and to help it to realize its obligation to facilitate West Africa’s progress and development on its own terms. Only this, WASU claimed, would safeguard the Empire’s political position within the new world order.

Their many adaptations of the concept of co-operation fundamentally changed the nature of the colonial relationship. By reframing the relationship from a colonial to a co-

¹⁹⁶ “News and Notes,” *Wasu* 3, 1 (March 1934), 6.

operative one, the students altered the colonial relationship and opened the possibility for mutual recognition between Africa and Britain. Co-operation demanded two separate and equal subjectivities capable of entering into a negotiated relationship—a far cry from the colonial one in which the colonizer assimilates the colonized as its other, imagining itself through a construction of the other as its opposite. Only by moving outside this model could the students begin to formulate a different kind of relationship with Britain. Their advocacy of co-operation demanded Africa’s separation from Britain and created the possibility for Africa’s subjecthood, autonomy and recognition.

The multiply-layered concept also allowed the students to shift the focus away from Britain by bringing the “world” into the discussion. Co-operation was tied to the principle of national self-determination and WASU’s interpretation and use of self-help philosophy. While not part of the discussion of national self-determination at the Paris Peace Conference, WASU insisted that Africa constituted an important part of the world. If West Africa was unable to exercise its “right” to express its nationhood, co-operation between nations and world peace would always be compromised. The world and the British Empire, WASU proposed, had to help West Africa achieve nationhood.

These three principles allowed the students to impose critical distance between themselves and Britain. This distance challenged Britain’s colonial authority by moving the relationship between Africa and Britain into a horizontal frame that included a variety of other actors and a host of ideas and resources for building WASU’s vision for West Africa. Borrowing lessons from Europe, Britain, and the world, they suggested, would ultimately lead Africa into its own and would prepare the way for its independence and equality with Britain within the Empire.

Their argument that all “advanced” societies were founded upon acts of imitation allowed them to borrow “lessons” from a variety of different groups and from this produce a modern African identity and culture that could not be reduced to Britain or Europe. Through the process of borrowing lessons from world history and other nationalist movements, Africa could emerge as modern Africa. In a speech to WASU, Casely Hayford stated, “I trust . . . that while the Indian, the Chinese, the Japanese, and others, are coming to Europe to widen their ideas, the West African will also come.”¹⁹⁷ Africans needed to “recognize that Britain has a lot more to offer him than all the imperialistic declarations from high Olympus.”¹⁹⁸ If these other groups had learned their industry from Britain, he asked, “why then should not we, too, in West Africa? Why should not we, too, harness the scientific developments of the century into our programme of progress?”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ J. E. Casely Hayford, “Nationalism as a West African Ideal,” *Wasu* 2 (December 1926), 24.

¹⁹⁸ J. B. Danquah, “The President’s Letter,” *Wasu*, 1, March 1926, 3.

¹⁹⁹ Hayford, “Nationalism as a West African Ideal,” 24.

Chapter 3

Who is a British Subject? Questioning Imperial Boundaries and Rights

In March 1932, Mr. Emmanuel Solomon Ajayi, a tutor from Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria, was issued a British Passport at Lagos for travel to the United States to attend the Agricultural College at the Hampton Institute.²⁰⁰ According to *West Africa*, this “Notable Nigerian” had worked his way up through the educational system, first as a pupil and then as a tutor. He had passed all of his teacher’s examinations and was a leader in his community. He had served as the Honorable Organizing Secretary to the Ijebu Farmers’ Association, Secretary of the Ijebu Native Administration Assessment Committee, Assistant Scoutmaster of the Boy Scouts, and was the first Honorary Secretary of the WASU branch at Ijebu-Ode.²⁰¹ That spring, he looked forward to completing a degree in agriculture and beginning his future career as a teacher in Nigeria. *West Africa* admired Ajayi’s “fine record” and anticipated “even better things” from this exemplary young African.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Passport number 8824 was issued to Ajayi on March 18, 1932. The passport defined his nationality as a “British Protected Person.” The passport was valid in the British Empire and the United States. CO 583-185-10, “Native Student. E.S. Ajayi.” 1932. Ajayi left his job of seventeen and a half years, his wife and three children, and sold his personal property in Nigeria in order to be a self-supporting student in the United States. From Ajayi’s petition to the “Home Government of the United States of America.” Ajayi sent a copy of his petition to Hanns Vischer at the Colonial Office in London in January 1933. CO 583-185-10, “Native Student. E.S. Ajayi.” 1932.

²⁰¹ Ajayi probably became Secretary of the W.A.S.U. Fraternity after returning to Nigeria in 1933. This information was obtained from *Wasu*, January 1933, v. II, no. 1. Ajayi’s academic and club activities were reported in *West Africa*, August 27, 1932.

²⁰² *West Africa*, August 27, 1932.

Before leaving Nigeria, Ajayi made every necessary preparation for his journey—he booked his passage, passed the mandatory medical examination, and obtained a visa from the U.S. Consulate in Lagos. Prepared to leave his country for at least three years, Ajayi sailed to Southampton, England where he was to meet the S. S. Olympic.²⁰³ Upon his arrival and just hours before his ship was due to set sail for America, he discovered that his visa had expired and would have to be re-issued before resuming his journey.²⁰⁴ A second visa required another medical exam that Ajayi failed owing to an untreated case of trachoma.²⁰⁵ Unable to complete his trip to America, Ajayi hired a solicitor and together they consulted the Home Office in London. Ajayi informed the Home Office of his intention to remain in England and study agriculture at Reading University.²⁰⁶ Within a few days of his visit, Ajayi received a letter from E. Davies with the Aliens' Department. Davies explained that Ajayi, as a "British Protected Person" and therefore

²⁰³ Petition from Ajayi to the United States, October 24, 1932. CO 583-185-10, "Native Student. E.S. Ajayi." 1932.

²⁰⁴ When he returned to London, Ajayi came into contact with an immigration officer from the YMCA who, the Manchester Guardian reported, helped him in his efforts to acquire a second visa. The Colonial Office was in communication with a Mr. R. Weston from the YMCA concerning Ajayi's case. It is therefore likely that Mr. Weston was the immigration officer who helped Ajayi when he returned to London. CO 583-185-10, "Native Student. E. S. Ajayi." 1932; "African Emigrant's Experience," *Manchester Guardian*, November 4, 1932.

²⁰⁵ According to Mr. Pedler at the Colonial Office, Ajayi had trachoma which caused inflammation of the eyes. The papers reported that Ajayi had glaucoma. Memo, February 28, 1933. CO 583-187-16, "Native Student. E.S. Ajayi." 1933.

²⁰⁶ Extract from semi-official letter from Sir Donald Cameron sent to Mr. Fiddian dated January 4, 1933 confirms that Mr. Ajayi spoke with someone at the Colonial Office before taking his case to the Home Office. Cameron wrote, "I must say that I have some doubts as to the imputation of the Home Office that he did not explain that he wished to remain in England, and it is indeed most unfortunate that whoever saw him in the Colonial Office when he called there was not successful in discovering what the fellow really wanted." A reaction to the letter, recorded in Ajayi's file by "R. T." at the Colonial Office on February 2, 1933 suggested Ajayi was worried about "troubling" the Colonial Office, which might explain his reluctance to inform officials at both offices of his desire to remain in the U.K. "R. T." recalled "how loath Mr Ajayi was to trouble the Colonial Office . . ." He added that he was "not in the least surprised to learn that he did not explain to the H. O. [Home Office] that he wishes to remain in England." From CO 583-185-10, "Native Student. E. S. Ajayi." 1932. According to Mr. Pedler at the Colonial Office, Ajayi was interviewed twice at the Home Office by an Inspector named "Mr. Davis." I am inferring that he meant Mr. Davies. He added that Ajayi sent to letters to the Home Office. Memo, March 14, 1933. CO 583-187-16, "Native Student. E. S. Ajayi." 1933.

“alien” to Great Britain, was not able to stay in the United Kingdom without a visa. He advised Ajayi to prepare his leave for Nigeria or “some other destination” at his earliest convenience.²⁰⁷

Astounded by the idea that a “British African” should be considered a foreigner in the very heart of the British Empire, Ajayi sent his reply to the Home Office in which he pointed out the irony of his situation. He wrote,

Although I requested the Home Office to allow me to study in England, they wrote me the above letter as a British Protected Person, Native of the Protectorate of Nigeria—an alien. Under the above circumstances I have no alternative but to return to Nigeria. If the Americans will not have me, and the British (with whose nationality I have been labeled) will not allow me to remain in their country . . . I should not be surprised if the French or the Germans were to throw me overboard if I made one of their countries my destination.²⁰⁸

His classification as alien was difficult to comprehend. Ajayi identified as a “British African” and loyal citizen of the British Empire.²⁰⁹ In his correspondence with government offices, he pleaded his case as a “subject of His Majesty,” asking for “fair judgment in the case as a *loyal member of the British Empire* and an appropriate

²⁰⁷ Letter to Ajayi from Mr. E. Davies at the “Aliens’ Branch of the Home Office,” August 30, 1932.

²⁰⁸ Letter dated September 1, 1932. Ajayi’s and Davies’ letters were reprinted in *West Africa* in the September 3, 1932 issue under the title, “A Nigerian’s Hard Experiences of Immigration and Alien Laws and Practice.”

²⁰⁹ Ajayi was not unique in his identification as a “British African.” Many western-educated Africans identified with the Empire. To have identified differently at this time would have been almost unthinkable. After a meeting between Nigerian student Nnamdi Azikiwe and Major Hanns Vischer of the Colonial Office in London, Vischer confessed that Azikiwe was not the “type of fellow he had expected to meet,” to which Azikiwe humorously responded, “You must have thought that I was a ‘Bolshie!’” Azikiwe stated that Vischer had failed to “appreciate that [he] was loyal to the British Empire.” Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey. An Autobiography* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1970), 211. On his voyage to the Gold Coast, Richard Wright told a judge from Nigeria “Say, you know, if you were not black, I’d say that you were an Englishman. In fact, you are more English than many English I’ve met,” to which the Nigerian judge replied, “I *am* English.” Richard Wright, *Black Power. A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954).

compensation [to be] awarded to [him] in England as a *British African*.”²¹⁰ Speaking as a “British African,” Ajayi insisted that he was entitled to British protection and assistance while traveling abroad. Ajayi had served as a scouter for twelve years, taught British African boys “the importance of the Empire and the Union Jack as the flag of Peace, Liberty, Equity and Justice,” and was a member of several committees.²¹¹ In the interest of “British justice and Fair-play,” Ajayi asked the government to compensate him for his expenses and for the poor treatment he had received from British officials in London.²¹²

Shortly after receiving notification of his inability to remain in England, Ajayi returned to West Africa where he continued to argue his case to the Colonial Office and the U.S. government, asking for financial compensation for his aborted trip and assistance with his future academic plans. Through his persistent letters to the Colonial Office, particularly his correspondence with Major Hanns Vischer, Ajayi secured a visa to the U.K. and completed his degree at Reading University.

The case of Ajayi is interesting for two reasons. First, it introduced several important questions about the political status of West Africa and West Africans in the Empire into public discussion, forcing a pointed exchange about race and empire among British colonial officials, West African students, and Europeans. Second, Ajayi’s experience with the Colonial Office and other imperial structures provides an unusual

²¹⁰ Memo by Mr. Pedler of the Colonial Office, February 28, 1933. CO 583-187-16 “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933; Ajayi’s petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, February 6, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

²¹¹ Ajayi’s petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, February 6, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

²¹² Ajayi’s petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, February 6, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933. His appeal to “British justice” and “fair-play” echoed earlier pleas made by West African seamen and black British workers in England.

opportunity to examine the ways that West African students used these structures to achieve their personal goals, and how they developed a unique form of “imperial citizenship.” The term citizenship can be viewed as the formal right to national belonging accompanied with certain political and legal rights, or it can be used as an analytical concept that refers to the practices that individuals and groups, both legally recognized “citizens” and people without formal citizenship, engage in to alter their political status, and to gain access to resources and rights from government structures. In my analysis of West African students’ political activities, I view citizenship as an analytical concept that accounts for the claim-making practices of legally recognized “citizens” (in the British case, “subjects”) and “non-citizens” (or “aliens). This approach is particularly relevant to British West Africans, who, owing to the particular colonial configuration of each of the four British territories in West Africa, were not all British subjects, in fact, most were legally recognized as British protected persons and were “alien” to Great Britain. West Africans born in the Crown colonies (usually the towns near the coast) were British subjects and held rights and obligations as British subjects, whereas West Africans born in the protectorate territories were British protected persons. British protected persons were “alien” to Britain and had to acquire a visa to travel to the United Kingdom. West Africans born in the Crown colonies in West Africa were British subjects, and could travel without a visa. The difference between these two groups, however, would likely not have entered public discussion if West Africans from the protectorate areas had not left the coast of West Africa.

Ajayi’s experience in London raised several questions in the British and African press around the categorization of British subjects. Were all the inhabitants of British

territories British subjects? Did these subjects share the same set of expectations and rights? Did rights and expectations change as people traveled within the Empire, between colonial, dominion and protectorate territories? Was a Nigerian born outside the Crown Colony of Nigeria entitled to the same rights as a Nigerian born inside the Colony? How did these definitions change as West Africans from the protectorate and colonies traveled between the four territories in West Africa and abroad? Ajayi's repatriation to Nigeria caused a stir in the British and African press around exactly these types of questions, calling attention to the unequal status of the different inhabitants of the British Empire, and contradicted the imperial images of a unified and united British Empire.

I begin my investigation of these press debates with an explanation of the political configuration of the Empire, namely the differences between dominion, colonial, protectorate, and mandate territories, and the difference between British protected persons and British subjects. I explore the development of the concept of British protected persons as it related to growing concerns about colonial migration, particularly of non-white colonial subjects, after the First World War. I then return to the case of Ajayi and the questions that it raised in the British and West African press followed by an analysis of Ajayi's experience and what it reveals about West African students' use of imperial structures.

The British Empire and British Subjecthood

As the British Empire expanded geographically, the laws of naturalization developed according to the needs of the different territories and thereby lost any overall coherence.²¹³ The legal definition of British subjecthood, therefore, changed according to the territory in which it was defined. As Ajayi's case clearly demonstrated, not everyone who formed part of the Empire had the same status or rights.²¹⁴ At the end of the First World War, the Empire consisted of the United Kingdom, and the dominion, colonial, protectorate, and mandate territories. Each of these territories was uniquely related to the British government and showed tremendous variation in degrees of political autonomy. By 1933, the self-governed white dominion governments formed part of the British Commonwealth as equal partners with Great Britain. The British colonies and protectorates were virtually the same in terms of British authority over these territories, though in theory protectorates had greater autonomy in the realm of "native affairs." British authority over the mandate territories was mediated by the League of Nations. People born in the Commonwealth and colonies were British subjects and those born in the protectorate and mandate territories were British protected persons. These were critical differences that divided the Empire. As discussed in Chapter 2, post-war imperial

²¹³ Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship. Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 53.

²¹⁴ Karatani argues that Britishness had little to do with the legal recognition of British subjects in terms of status or in terms of rights. Karatani explains that persons born in the Crown colonies did not automatically have the same rights as a British subject born in England. Laura Tabili's research confirms this. She finds that many black British subjects from the Crown colonies in West Africa and the Caribbean had limited access to passports, which were virtually unavailable for the majority of black subjects living throughout the Empire before World War II. Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 60; Laura Tabili, *"We ask for British Justice" Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 36.

propaganda downplayed these differences and promoted an image of a uniform empire in which all inhabitants were British subjects.

According to the British Nationality Act (BNA) of 1914 and until the passage of the BNA of 1948, a British subject referred to anyone who owed allegiance to the British Crown, regardless of the exact location in which the person was born. The British protectorate and mandate territories fell outside of this definition and were considered independent countries “temporarily” under the control of the British government. Between the World Wars, the protectorate territories of West Africa included areas outside of the coastal towns of Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Gambia, and the Gold Coast.²¹⁵ Further complicating the status of the West Africa territories was the fact that not one of the four countries was entirely a protectorate, but contained areas that were British colonies and its inhabitants British subjects. In the case of Sierra Leone, the entire territory with the exception of two small protected areas, Temne and Shenge, was a Crown colony. The three other territories were similarly divided, though with a much larger percentage of protectorate areas than in the case of Sierra Leone. The Colony of Gambia included Banjul and the surrounding area. The Colony of the Gold Coast encompassed the coastal area with Accra as its administrative center. Most of Nigeria was protectorate territory, with the exception of the Colony of Lagos and nearby towns.²¹⁶ Africans born within the colony were legally British subjects. Thus, in theory,

²¹⁵ Other British protectorates included Basutoland, Bechuanaland, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Swaziland, Uganda, Walvis Bay, Zanzibar, British Solomon Islands, Tonga, British Borneo, Bhutan, Brunei, Malaya, Maldives, Sarawak, Aden Protectorates in Yemen, British Residency of the Persian Gulf, British Somaliland, and Egypt (until 1922). The mandate territories acquired at the end of the First World War included Iraq, Palestine, Tanganyika, British Cameroons, and British Togoland.

²¹⁶The British authorities in London viewed the Protectorate of Nigeria as foreign country. In a strict legal sense, the Protectorate of Nigeria was “necessarily a foreign country, and its inhabitants, therefore, alien.” A. Ade Ademola, a Nigerian student who sent letters in reference to Ajayi’s case to both *West Africa* and

an African born in Lagos or Accra was entitled to the same rights and privileges as a British subject born in England. Colonial and protectorate boundaries were unstable and shifted during the colonial period, making the identification of British subjects and British protected persons all the more tenuous.

Ajayi was born outside of Lagos in a town in the southern region called Shagamu. In a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Ajayi asked the government to investigate whether or not Shagamu was considered to be part of the Colony at the time of his birth in 1896. And, if not, he argued, his allegiance to the King of England was the same as a Lagos born subject. He wrote,

In Nigeria, especially the Southern Provinces to which I belong, we are ruled under the same law both in the Colony and in the Protectorate, and there is no difference whatever in our loyalty to the King-Emperor to whom we owe allegiance.²¹⁷

Wasu magazines, accepted the Home Office's position that the Protectorate of Nigeria was technically a foreign country and its inhabitant were, in "a modified sense," aliens of Britain. He stated, "Heads of tribal communities have by agreements put themselves under the protection of Great Britain. The agreements vary with different tribes; we may even find a few cases of cession, but, on the whole, the object in each case is that under British superintendence each community, through its own Natural Ruler, can be the most useful instrument of its own advancement; internal sovereignty is usually left in the hands of natural Rulers." A. Ade Ademola, "Protectorates and the Ajayi Case." Letter to the Editor, *West Africa*, October 29, 1932, 1119.

²¹⁷ Mr. Bigg from the Colonial Office in London wrote, "If the Governor had said that Shagamu had never formed part of the Colony, it would be quite clear that Ajayi is a British protected person and not a British subject. But the last sentence of the Gov's despatch [sic] suggests that Shagamu might at some later stage have formed part of the Colony. If that is the case then Ajayi's national status still seems to be in doubt" (June 9, 1933). Mr. Pedler from the Colonial Office suggested on June 9, 1933 that Shagamu never formed part of the Colony and therefore Ajayi was a protected person and not a British subject. Another administrator, Mr. Hazlerigg wrote, "Mr. Pedler has been very exhaustively into the question whether Shagamu ever became part of the Colony proper after 1894. As the result of his researches-see No. 13- he is satisfied that it never did. So am I." Memo, Hazlerigg, June 15, 1933. In a report by A. Fiddian concerning Ajayi's nationality question, Fiddian investigated whether Shagamu was ever part of the Colony and, if yes, was Ajayi a British subject? He concluded that Shagamu was never part of the Colony and Ajayi was, therefore, not a British subject but a British protected person. Fiddian's memo is dated March 17, 1933. Fiddian's report was well-research and included legal sources. He also contacted the Governor of Nigeria for additional information about the relationship between Shagamu and the Colony. The Governor of Nigeria, in a letter to Philip Cunliffe-Lister (dated July 29, 1933) reported Ajayi was not a British subject because his place of birth was not part of the Colony at the time of his birth. CO 583-187-16. "Native Student. E. S. Ajayi." 1933.

After researching the status of Shagamu at the time of Ajayi's birth, the Home and Colonial offices concluded that it was never part of the Crown Colony. Thus, it was determined Ajayi was a British protected person and alien.

In theory, the inhabitants of the protectorates owed their primary allegiance to a sovereign other than the British government and were not legally recognized British subjects. In their home countries they were "native nationals" and when they traveled beyond their country of origin they became "British protected persons." As native nationals and British protected persons, they were alien to Great Britain, and were subject to the provisions of the Aliens Orders (in the memos, the Colonial Office references the Aliens Order of 1920). This in contrast to British subjects born in the United Kingdom, dominions, and crown colonies entitled to travel freely throughout the Empire.²¹⁸ British protected persons, like all other non-nationals, for example a French citizen, had to obtain visas, satisfy the medical examiners, and provide evidence of financial support while residing in the U.K. The only exemption was the promise that native nationals (excluding West African seamen) of certain protectorates (including Nigeria) would be treated favorably in their application to reside in the U.K.²¹⁹

The legal definition of alien did not originate with the protectorate territories, but was first articulated through the Aliens Acts (of 1793, 1826 and 1848) formed in

²¹⁸ In 1927 the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland included Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales) and Northern Ireland. The Irish Free State became a Dominion in 1922. The dominions were self-governing countries within the British Empire. They included Canada, Australia, Newfoundland, South Africa, the Irish Free State, and New Zealand. They formed part of the British Commonwealth after WWII (Commonwealth citizenship was introduced through the British Nationality Act of 1948). In 1948, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon obtained Dominion/Commonwealth status. The Crown colonies (some times referred to as the dependencies) included British West Indies, India, Hong Kong, and Ceylon.

²¹⁹ Letter from E. H. Cooper at the Home Office, London to the Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, November 24, 1932. CO 583-185-10, "Native Student. E. S. Ajayi." 1932.

response to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.²²⁰ Several additional Aliens Acts were issued as “war time measures” and had no relationship to the Empire, but were designed to regulate “alien enemies,” mainly of European origin, and to ensure British nationality of natural born British subjects and their offspring living abroad.²²¹ Likewise, the origin of the legal category British protected person had little or nothing to do with Britain’s overseas territories. According to London-based solicitor A. L. Bryden, writing in response to Ajayi’s case, the category was first introduced to provide legal protection to a small and elite group of individuals and their families, usually members of the former Turkish Empire and Persia employed as interpreters, ambassadors, or consul in the U.K.²²² As Bryden pointed out, unlike West Africans, these persons were subjects of independent and sovereign states and were not controlled by the British government.

How did the term come to be used in reference to West Africans?

Concern over the migration of colonial subjects from the protectorates and Crown colonies within the Empire began in response to the increasing migration of non-white British colonial and protected persons to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Union

²²⁰ These laws regulated “immigration flows [from the European continent] by authorizing the collection of the list of foreign passengers on board an arriving ship, enabling their expulsion when this was deemed necessary.” Karatani. *Defining British Citizenship*, 53.

²²¹ These included the Aliens Restriction Act (of 1914), the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act (of 1918 and 1922), the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act (of 1919), and the Aliens Order (of 1920 and 1925). The British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act of 1922 conferred British subject status on all persons and their offspring who fought for Great Britain during WWI. The Act of 1922 covered all “ ‘the children born after the Act of 1914 was passed’, the government made the BN & SA act of 1922 retrospective to 1 January 1915 (s. 1(1)(b)(ii)). The conditions for acquisition by descent were simplified even further by the British Nationality & Status of Aliens Act of 1943 (6 & 7 Geo. 6., c. 14, BN & SA act 1943).” Karatani. *Defining British Citizenship*. 85.

²²² A. L. Bryden. “‘British Subjects’ and ‘British-Protected Persons.’ Some Issues Raised by the Ajayi Case,” *West Africa*, October 1, 1932, 1018. Laura Tabili’s research confirms that the Aliens Branch of the Home Office was originally set up to regulate the migration of foreign diplomats and Europeans into the United Kingdom. Tabili, “*We ask for British Justice*,” 36.

of South Africa.²²³ The issue of colonial migration dominated the Imperial Conferences of 1907 and 1911.²²⁴ At the conference of 1911, the British government granted the white dominion governments of Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa full control over local naturalization laws (the Canadian government defined its own citizenship while maintaining the status of British subject through the enactment of the Canadian Immigration Act of 1910). This agreement gave the white dominion governments the power to exclude British subjects of color and was foundational to the establishment of the common code (and later the British Commonwealth). The common code permitted these governments to grant local nationality according to their own terms that co-existed with an empire-wide and uniform imperial nationality. For example, a person born in Australia was both an Australian citizen and a British subject. The common code system, however, was not created to grant dual citizenship, but was designed to enable white dominion governments to exercise greater control over the immigration of non-white British subjects into their borders and workforce.²²⁵

A second, related set of concerns and legislation over colonial migration and nationality emerged in relation to colonial seamen. During the interwar period, the Aliens Branch of the Home Office became increasingly involved in controlling migration

²²³ Lord Milner quoted in Ian Fletcher, "Double Meanings: Nation and Empire in the Edwardian Era." In *After the Imperial Turn, Thinking With and Through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 248.

²²⁴ These Conferences began in 1887 and were first called the Colonial Conferences; additional conferences followed in 1902, 1907, and 1911. The goal of these Conferences, as stated at the meeting of 1907, was to promote communication between the British government and the governments of the self-governing Dominion countries. The Conferences represented an emergent form of "inter-imperial relations which was based more on 'the voluntary action of free partners' than on 'superiority and subordination. Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 74-76.

²²⁵ Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*. 74-76.

from the British colonies and protectorates into the United Kingdom.²²⁶ The Branch was initially concerned with preventing black seamen from settling in the U.K. (the only group of seamen singled out for mandatory registration). In the 1920s, the Aliens Branch introduced the Coloured Alien Seamen Order and the Special Restriction of Coloured Alien Seamen. Both enabled British officials to indiscriminately refuse British protected seamen leave to land and seriously compromised these men's ability to negotiate employment contracts. These laws required all undocumented and black seamen to register as alien with the police department. British protected West African seamen faced deportation as a result of their registration, while West African British subjects received official confirmation of their right to live and work in the U.K. The passport gave West Africa British subjects access to better wages and working conditions. It allowed these men to assert "their right to live and work anywhere in the British Empire, including Britain itself."²²⁷ Registration was empowering in ways that shipping companies were eager to avoid—as British subjects, seamen could join labor unions, demand British wages, and negotiate with their employers without fear of deportation. West African seamen without passports or registered as alien were not legally British subjects and shipping companies paid these workers less than their British employees.

²²⁶ The formal regulation of West African travelers began with the passing the Merchant Shipping Act in 1906. The Act contained a variety of measures designed to prevent colonial seamen (the majority of whom were from British West Africa) from settling in the United Kingdom. In 1910, the nationality status of the African protectorates was further articulated in a legal case concerning the Bechuanaland Protectorate, *Rex v. Crewe*. The judge in this case determined that the protected states did not form part of the British dominion and were "foreign" states. Thus, inhabitants of the protected states, native born or immigrant settlers, were not nationals of the protecting state (Great Britain), but were entitled to Britain's protection when traveling in foreign countries. Tabili, "*We ask for British Justice*," 36; A. Ade Ademola, B.A. (Hons.) Cantab. "Position of the Protectorates and Mr. Ajayi's Case. Letter to the editor of *Wasu* 1, 9, December 1932, 29-30.

²²⁷ Laura Tabili, "'Keeping the Natives Under Control': Race Segregation and the Domestic Dimensions of Empire, 1920-1939," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 44 (Fall 1993), 71.

Fearing that workers would gain legal recognition as British subjects through registration, shipping companies went to great lengths to discourage black seamen from registering. During the interwar period, the Elder Dempster Lines made a series of agreements with the Home Office that exempted their West African employees from registration. This arrangement allowed the Dempster Lines to pay lower wages to unregistered West Africans, and, as historian Laura Tabili argues, was “frankly designed to impede West African seamen from claiming their rights as British subjects in order to deny them access to the British labor market.”²²⁸ The Home Office allowed the Dempster Lines to deny West African seamen passports in exchange for the company’s “nominal commitment to take financial responsibility for the men the company abandoned ill in Britain.”²²⁹ The Board of Trade finally revoked the agreement in the 1930s owing to the fact that the company continued to routinely abandon colonial seamen at Liverpool and repeatedly failed to fulfill its promise to “repatriate ‘undesirables’ to Africa.”²³⁰ Additional modifications to these laws corresponded with concern over the high unemployment rate in the United Kingdom during the 1930s.²³¹

While this legislation was not originally intended to regulate the migration of West African students, its existence had serious consequences for this group. Legal recognition as a British subject greatly enhanced the lives of West African travelers. British subjecthood offered the right to remain in the U.K. indefinitely and access to

²²⁸ Tabili, “Keeping the Natives Under Control,” 66.

²²⁹ Tabili, “Keeping the Natives Under Control,” 70.

²³⁰ The practice of abandoning seamen at Liverpool left a number of undocumented black seamen destitute in England and unable to return to their country of origin. Tabili, “Keeping the Natives Under Control,” 70.

²³¹ In reference to Ajayi’s case, a colonial administrator wrote, “it will be difficult to secure any relaxation of the conditions on which British protected persons may come to the U.K. so long as the unemployment problem continues to be so acute.” Note signed by Mr. Bigg of the Colonial Office, November 15, 1932.

better wages and working conditions. The racism that underpinned imperial and colonial nationality laws of the interwar period might have escaped the attention of the press had western-educated West Africans from the protected territories not traveled beyond colonial boundaries.²³² The spread of education beyond the coastal towns of West Africa and the increasing movement of people from these areas within the region and abroad after the war took the British government by surprise. Britain's policy of indirect rule in West Africa assumed native nationals from West Africa's interior would never travel outside his or her "tribal" community, and certainly not beyond the coast of West Africa. Through indirect rule, the British imagined native nationals less as individual subjects, and more as static and "tribal" collective that could easily be governed indirectly through African chiefs. A critical shortcoming of this policy was its inability to accommodate the movement of individuals between protectorate and colonial territories within West Africa and also between West Africa and the United Kingdom.

Who is a British Subject?

British and African newspaper writers and readers, along with colonial administrators and African students expressed their concern over the case of Ajayi. Several British and West African papers reported on Ajayi's "disquieting and expensive

²³² It is interesting to note, however, that the British government's discrimination against British protected seamen went virtually unnoticed by the British press whereas it was stunned by the treatment of western-educated it deemed "exemplary" Africans.

experience” in England in the form of articles and letters.²³³ The *Manchester Guardian* wrote that Ajayi had been “expelled” from the U.K. after having been misled by the U.S. Consular Service in Lagos. The *Nigerian Daily Telegraph* described his brief experience abroad as shocking.²³⁴ *West Africa* described the case as “another astonishing incident” in which a Nigerian man was excluded from “the United States of America and from England through purely ‘red-tape’ passport irregularities—irregularities which arose through no fault of his own.”²³⁵

Readers were both outraged and perplexed. They sent letters to the press that attempted to explain the political position of British West Africa in the British Empire and the complicated legal definitions of British protected persons and British subjects. Reader A. L. Bryden argued that the Home Office missed “the real factual situation of Nigeria in relation to the Crown.”²³⁶ In Nigeria, the power of the Crown was “unchallengeable, and, if possible, more absolute than it [was] in a Crown Colony, and [had] submerged the power of the Native Rulers.”²³⁷ Indeed, all the inhabitants of the British West Africa served the Crown—they had fought in the First World War, contributed to the imperial economy, and were members of the British Empire. Thus, the British protected person was “in reality no more an ‘alien’ than [was] a Native of the Colony of Lagos or Sierra Leone, or, indeed, of England.”²³⁸ Putting the matter to

²³³ In a letter to the Elder Dempster Lines, Hanns Vischer at the Colonial Office stated that Ajayi’s return to West Africa in 1932 “caused a colossal stir in the local press.” Letter to Major G. F. Torrey of the Elder Dempster Lines from Hanns Vischer, September 24, 1935. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933

²³⁴ “African Emigrants Experiences.” *Manchester Guardian*, November 4, 1932; *Nigerian Daily Telegraph*, September 24, 1932.

²³⁵ *West Africa*, September 23, 1933.

²³⁶ Bryden, “‘British Subjects’ and ‘British-Protected Persons,’” 1019.

²³⁷ Bryden, “‘British Subjects’ and ‘British-Protected Persons,’” 1019.

²³⁸ Bryden, “‘British Subjects’ and ‘British-Protected Persons,’” 1018.

“objective legal tests,” Bryden asked if a British protected person could be convicted of treason for acts committed in the Protectorate of Nigeria to overthrow British authority, or could he, as a foreigner, obtain a certificate of nationalization in the Colony of Nigeria or England? He speculated that there was little doubt that a British protected person could be convicted of treason and was unlikely to be granted a certificate of naturalization in either location.²³⁹ If Britain was genuine in its legal recognition of Ajayi as alien, Ajayi would have had the option of moving to the Colony of Lagos where he could be made a naturalised British subject under the British Nationality Status of Aliens Act of 1914.²⁴⁰ British protected West Africans, however, did not have this possibility available to them, which only fueled public opinion that the British protected West African was poorly situated, lacking the advantages associated with alien status and having none of the benefits of British subjecthood. A letter writer made a similar point, arguing that when it came to fighting for the Empire, British protected persons were “permitted full privileges . . . yet when it [came] to being recognised as British subjects by the Passport Office the imaginary line that separates a Colony from a Protectorate [became] a barrier that, to a less persevering man than an Ajayi, [was] insurmountable.”²⁴¹ The case of Ajayi brought attention to imperial contradictions that hooked into the much larger problem of race and empire—a problem that the imperial propaganda of the interwar years only served to obscure.

²³⁹ Bryden, “‘British Subjects’ and ‘British-Protected Persons,’” 1018.

²⁴⁰ If Ajayi were a protected alien he would have the right to be naturalized in England and he did not; rather, protected persons from West Africa did not have the benefits of being truly alien. Bryden, “‘British Subjects’ and ‘British-Protected Persons,’” 1018.

²⁴¹ “The Case of Mr. E. S. Ajayi,” *West Africa*, September 23, 1933, 943. As Ajayi argued in his petition to the Colonial Office, he would have been better off traveling in a foreign country (other than England) where he would have received the assistance of the British Consulate.

Colonial administrators had mixed reactions to the case. Some were worried that Ajayi would return to Nigeria “disquieted” and “liable to spread disaffection.”²⁴² An exchange between two administrators at the Colonial Office presents this view. Writing to Alex Fiddian, Donald Cameron wrote,

I have said that the greater part of the people who consume cigarettes are illiterate. Some of them are not, for example, a large number of the Yorubas. If I were to preach the use of the Empire Tobacco to the Yorubas now, they would smile, in view of the case of Mr. Emmanuel Solomon Ajayi, whom they believe was thrown out of the United Kingdom because he was only a British Protected person.²⁴³

In the opinion of most administrators, the treatment of British West Africans as alien, especially educated men like Ajayi was wrong and required explanation. Reacting to the discussion of Ajayi’s case in the British and West African papers, an administrator at the Colonial Office remarked,

I must admit that there is something incongruous to my mind in the distinction between a ‘British Subject’ and a ‘British Protected Person,’ but we are not responsible for these technicalities and I should be sorry if the question were to be raised on cuttings from a newspaper.²⁴⁴

Another agreed; the case had raised serious questions about the position of British protected persons in the Empire, which he believed “very unsatisfactory” and deserving

²⁴² Memo, April 5, 1933. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933. This was a common concern expressed at this time, see also Colonial Office files on African students and Aggrey House.

²⁴³ From semi-official letter, Sir Donald Cameron to Mr. Fiddian, January 4, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

²⁴⁴ Note signed by G. Hazlerigg dated October 21, 1932. His comment is in reference to the controversy in the *West Africa* magazine over the status of protected persons. CO 583-185-10, “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1932.

of attention.²⁴⁵ They lobbied to support Ajayi against the abuses of the Home Office and sought answers to his case through contact with the colonial government of Nigeria.

Among African students, the first to question Ajayi's repatriation was law student J. Sarkodee Adoo. In his letter to *West Africa*, he asked the British government to recognize Africans as partners willing to "co-operate to effect peace, if her sons are given the recognition they deserve as fellow-citizens."²⁴⁶ Like many WASU members at this time, he argued for dominion status for West Africa.²⁴⁷ Nigerian student Nnamdi Azikiwe asked the readers of *West Africa* if it was fair to deny protected persons the full benefits of British subjecthood. From the standpoint of custom and usage, the Protectorate of Nigeria was in a state of allegiance to the King of England and, therefore, its inhabitants should be treated as British subjects. Drawing upon international law, he wrote,

So far as international law is concerned, a Protectorate is a form of disguised occupation, which has no legal, but extra-legal, status. Thus a Protectorate is an anomaly, since its source of legal authority and control must be sought for in the laws, decrees, or charters of the protecting or annexing State, rather than from treaties with Chiefs. In this sense, the main advantage to the two parties, protector and protected, is protection for allegiance.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ CO 583-185-10, "Native Student. E. S. Ajayi." 1932.

²⁴⁶ J. Sarkodee Adoo, Jr., Barrister-at-Law, Inner Temple. Letter to the Editor, *West Africa* December 9, 1933, 1249.

²⁴⁷ Adoo argued for a re-evaluation of the constitutional position of the Gold Coast within the Empire. He explained that most scholars had overlooked the Fanti Bond, and had mistakenly assumed the British Gold Coast to be a Crown Colony. Adoo argued that the Gold Coast was not a Crown Colony, but was instead a "component of States with British influence." Adoo suggested that because the agreement was temporary, the tie between Africans and Britain was a moral rather than a legal tie and therefore the allegiance of Africans to Britain was secondary to their allegiance to the Native Rulers. Despite this fact, Africans had remained loyal and "are recognised as British subjects." He stated that the unique position of the Gold Coast required further investigation, especially in light of the fact that in theory the Empire (as argued by imperialists' after the war) was an "association of free nations." Adoo, Letter to the Editor, *West Africa* December 9, 1933, 1249.

²⁴⁸ Ben N. Azikiwe, Letter to the Editor, *West Africa*, December 10, 1932. The letter was written while Nnamdi Azikiwe was completing his degree at Lincoln University in the U.S.

From the perspective of international law, the persons and things in the Protectorate “are under the jurisdiction of the protecting State, and are, therefore, its protégés . . . Nigerians are British protégés *de facto*, and British subjects *de jure*.”²⁴⁹ Azikiwe’s reference to international law demonstrates West African students’ use of both imperial and international resources.

African students questioned the extent to which racism was responsible for Ajayi’s passport troubles. O. A. Alakija stated in a letter to *West Africa*, “[r]educed to a minimum, a person cannot become a British subject with full rights unless he wakes up one day and finds his skin ‘colourless.’” He argued the Colonial Office had sacrificed the “practical rights” of Africans for the sake of a “virtually obsolete theory,” concluding, “If Mr. Ajayi’s case is allowed to remain as authority, other ‘British Protected’ Nigerians, or, for that matter, ‘British Protected West Africans,’ may have to thank their stars in the near future that they are aliens when it suits their purpose!”²⁵⁰ Azikiwe expressed a similar opinion. If after considering all of these arguments, the British Home Office was still of the opinion that Nigerians were not British nationals despite their clear affiliation with the British Empire, he suggested there would be “no need to protest.” He explained, “It is but fair to England to accord to it its sovereign rights to decide who shall be its citizens. On the other hand, it is a lesson which needs no comment; a challenge to African nationalism.”²⁵¹ If the Empire refused to recognize West Africa and West Africans as West African British subjects, the students would find a path outside it to develop their independence.

²⁴⁹ Azikiwe, Letter to the Editor, *West Africa*, December 10, 1932.

²⁵⁰ O. A. Alakija, *West Africa*, October 8, 1932. Alakija sent his letter from Hampstead, London.

²⁵¹ Azikiwe, Letter to the Editor, *West Africa*, December 10, 1932.

More than two years after the case had first been reported in the press, Azikiwe referred it as an example of race prejudice embedded in colonial and imperial policies in his meeting with Hanns Vischer of the Colonial Office in London. During a conversation about higher appointments for Africans in the civil service Azikiwe “made it plain to Major Vischer that [he] was fed up with the whole business.” When Vischer asked why, he replied, “. . . I would rather face overwhelming odds to provide for the future economic security of my children than depend upon official largesse usually doled out on humiliating conditions.” He added, “[Major Vischer] thought that I had misunderstood British colonial policy. Then I mentioned the case of E. S. Ajayi, an agriculturist. I also referred to the offer of £200 per annum to African lawyers and physicians, while their European counterparts were offered £450.”²⁵² In April 1933, a colonial administrator noted that Dr. Norman Leys, a British medical doctor who had served twelve years in Kenya and published several books and articles in opposition to indirect rule and the colour bar in Africa, had recently quoted the case of Ajayi.²⁵³

The case had a significant impact on British educated West Africans. It embodied much larger questions and problems associated with British rule in West Africa and the legal status and rights of British West Africans in the Empire. It illustrated the limitations of Britishness as an identity and source of identification for different groups within the Empire, and highlighted the seemingly illogical division between colony and

²⁵² Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 210. Azikiwe also mentions E. S. Ajayi as an old friend who had the pleasure of visiting during his three month stay in London in 1934.

²⁵³ Memo, A. Fiddian, April 3, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933. Norman Leys was a medical doctor in Kenya for twelve years and a Christian socialist. He published several books on Kenya. One of his books, *The Colour Bar in East Africa*, Hogarth Press, 1941, is a study of race relations under imperialism in East Africa. From Nancy Cunard (Edited by Maureen Moynagh). *Essays on Race and Empire*. Broadview Press, 2002. On April 4, 1933, Hanns Vischer told Ajayi that he had read a good deal about his case in the West African press. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

protectorate Africans that I argue had roots in indirect rule and British assumption about “native” Africans living outside the coastal urban areas. Otherwise how could it be that Nigerians from the protectorate could perform Britishness and could be persuaded to think of themselves as British Africans, but never gain recognition as “British subjects *de jure*”? Posing and debating these kinds of questions in the press could only have occurred outside of West Africa, within what Ian Fletcher identifies as an “imperial public sphere, through which circulated critical as well as official discussion of the problems of the imperial state,” and encompassed differently situated actors of the British Empire—from anti-colonial nationalists to dominion nationalists.²⁵⁴ As Fletcher explains, at this time and within this space, nationalism and imperialism were not incompatible, but were creatively being restructured by different groups, one in relation to the other. WASU formed part of this imperial network and conversation, though, as Fletcher notes, the political canvass of colonized people of color was much more expansive than white dominion imperial reformers.²⁵⁵

As discussed in Chapter 2, West African students developed their nationalism within the larger context of internationalism and debates on imperial reform.²⁵⁶ West

²⁵⁴ Fletcher uses Casely Hayford’s *Ethiopia Unbound* to illustrate the complexity of colonial thinking on imperialism and colonialism during the Edwardian period. He argues that the political projects and critiques of colonialism issued by colonial subjects should not be reduced to anti-imperial nationalism, but should be viewed in more open terms, as representing a struggle similar to other colonized and non-colonized intellectuals at the time to refashion transnational, national, and cosmopolitan identities. Fletcher, “Double Meanings,” 249.

²⁵⁵ Fletcher, “Double Meanings,” 246-259.

²⁵⁶ Many scholars have labeled all critiques of colonialism, particularly those issued by colonial subjects, as anti-colonial and anti-imperial. I have found the term “anti-imperial” especially misleading. Many groups including the West African Students’ Union which have been labeled anti-imperialists were not opposed to imperialism outright, but were instead sought imperial reform (see Chapter 2). Provided that many of these groups did not call for an end to imperialism altogether, I have chosen to refer to these groups as imperial reformers. In 1900, imperial critics from all parts of the Empire were unable to envision a world without European empires and sought instead to humanize imperialism. The pan-African Conference of 1900 in London followed similarly. Pan-Africanists critiqued imperial policies, but did not call for the end of

African students' discussion was further informed by their involvement in international student and youth organizations, pan-African debates and conferences, and anti-colonialism, all of which influenced their approach to indirect rule and shaped their political projects. Their access to political debates within and outside imperial networks (or, as Fletcher argues, an imperial public sphere), introduced additional options and possibilities for increasing their status and accessing resources outside the colonial structure.

* * *

Two years after his first appearance in the British papers, *West Africa* cheerfully reported that the “well-known son of Ijebu-Ode,” E. S. Ajayi, had completed a successful first year at Reading University and had “just returned from Denmark, where he went to attend a summer course at the International College, Elsinore, on Danish Agricultural co-operative methods. . . . As a schoolmaster, Mr. Ajayi seized the opportunity to study their general educational methods. Visits were paid to experimental stations, agricultural schools and colleges, and the last days were spent at the Co-operative College at Middelfort, where he saw the new bridge over the Little Belt River, which is said to be the biggest bridge in Europe, and is to be completed next year.” In August 1934, Ajayi had returned to London where he was studying “British co-operative methods” and would

imperialism; rather they asked the imperial governments to protect its African subjects, which meant offering Africans political recognition and protection. Jonathan Schneer, “Anti-Imperial London: the Pan-African Conference of 1900,” in Felix Driver and David Gilbert, eds. *Imperial Cities. Landscape, Display and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 255-6; 263-4.

soon be traveling to Manchester for the same purpose.”²⁵⁷ A year later, Ajayi informed the Colonial Office that he was nearing completion of his degree and had been offered a job with the Department of Agriculture in Nigeria; he would return to his country at the end of the academic year.

Ajayi’s experience provides an opportunity to analyze the concrete ways colonial students used and appropriated imperial institutions and language in order to issue claims and fulfill personal objectives.²⁵⁸ His story attests to the agency and creativity of West African student travelers. In his struggle to pursue a degree in agriculture, Ajayi consulted nearly every colonial and imperial agency as well as the United States government for financial and legal assistance. A colonial administrator, Hazlerigg, labeled Ajayi’s approach as indecisive, whereas another administrator, Alex Fiddian, argued Ajayi had never changed his mind. From the beginning, he had pursued his desire for “good professional training,” first in the U.S. and when that did not work out, in the United Kingdom. What Hazlerigg had described as a series of random pursuits reflected instead “a change of tactics” on Ajayi’s part to reach his educational goal.²⁵⁹ This is the view that I adopt in my analysis of Ajayi’s educational pursuits.

The newspapers in England failed to mention that Ajayi had hired a lawyer and suggested instead that Ajayi had had the good fortune of meeting with the immigration officer from the YMCA who, the papers claimed, helped Ajayi negotiate his second

²⁵⁷ *West Africa*, August 18, 1934.

²⁵⁸ Frederick Cooper, “Modernizing Colonialism and the Limits of Empire,” *Items & Issues Social Science Research Council* 4, 4 (2003), 9.

²⁵⁹ Notes from the Colonial Office, Hazlerigg, April 1, 1933. Note by A. Fiddian appear in the margins of Hazlerigg’s commentary on Ajayi’s situation. CO 583-187-16 “Native Student. E.S. Ajayi.” 1933.

medical exam and accompanied him to the Home Office. While this narrative likely pleased British readers who liked to think of themselves as the benevolent guardians of the colonial empire, it is inaccurate. Colonial Office records of Ajayi's interviews with the Home Office attest to his initiative and persistence in arguing his case. Ajayi attended both meetings with his solicitor and not the YMCA officer, and during his interviews he requested that the contact the U.S. Consular Service on his behalf. When he discovered that he had been denied a second visa, he asked the Office to help him find a comparable degree program in England.²⁶⁰ Ajayi initiated contact with the faculty of agriculture at Reading University and obtained information on the application procedure and fees. After discovering that he could not legally remain in the U.K., he booked his return to Nigeria. Within a few days of his arrival at Lagos, he sent letters to the American Consul in Lagos, the Government of Nigeria, the Colonial Office in London, and a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. In his formal petition to the "Home Government of the United States of America" he argued Ajayi alleged that the U.S. Consul at Lagos had "misinformed him as to the period of the validity of a visa on account of which Mr. Ajayi, on arrival in the United Kingdom, was prevented from proceeding to the United States."²⁶¹ He argued that the mistake had cost him his job in Nigeria and travel expenses. He requested that the U.S. government offer him financial

²⁶⁰ "It is evident that Mr. Ajayi was swayed between various courses. At first his main desire was to get the Home Office to exercise their influence with the United States Consul to enable him to proceed to America. The Home Office did, in fact, telephone the Consul, but were informed that Mr. Ajayi was suffering from trachoma, and that the Consul's decision was final." From Mr. Pedler's February 28, 1933 memo. CO 583-187-16. "Native Student. E. S. Ajayi." 1933.

²⁶¹ Petition from Ajayi to the "Home Government of the United States of America," sent via the Governor of Nigeria, October 24, 1932. CO 583-185-10, "Native Student. E. S. Ajayi." 1932.

compensation for his losses and for having suffered embarrassment in “a far country.”²⁶² As evidence, he included copies of his original correspondence with the Consular Service at Lagos that confirmed that he was, in fact, misinformed of the dates. Ajayi mailed additional copies of his petition to Major Hanns Vischer at the Colonial Office in London. The petition was also forwarded by the Governor of Nigeria to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister.²⁶³ His request for compensation was denied, but his actions demonstrate a familiarity with the British administrative system and reveal the great lengths to which Ajayi was willing to travel in order to receive compensation in order to have the funds to return to the England the following year for his course at Reading.

During the months following his return to West Africa, Ajayi kept in close contact with the Colonial Office and continued to pursue his educational plans. In January 1933, he moved to Accra, Gold Coast, where he attended classes at Achimota College and prepared for the entrance examination for Reading. In anticipation of his return to England, he sent letters to Hanns Vischer at the Colonial Office requesting his assistance with his visa and asked that he be allowed to land in the United Kingdom without a second medical examination (required of all aliens). His request was initially declined, though he did not give up and sent several additional letters on the subject; his request was finally granted in July 1933.²⁶⁴ His determination did not go unnoticed. On

²⁶² Petition from Ajayi to the “Home Government of the United States of America,” sent via the Governor of Nigeria, October 24, 1932. CO 583-185-10, “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1932.

²⁶³ These documents were sent via the Governor of Nigeria. On February 10, 1933, Ajayi sent a copy of his petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Hanns Vischer at the Colonial Office, as well as copies of his original correspondence with the American Consul at Lagos from Achimota College.

²⁶⁴ On February 2, 1933, in a letter from Ajayi to Vischer, Ajayi asked for an exemption from passing a second medical examination upon arriving in the U.K. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933. In June 1933, Ajayi completed his medical examination at the Gold Coast Hospital in Accra. He sent

September 23, 1933, *West Africa* reported, “Mr. Ajayi, in spite of discouragement, has continued to fight his case from Lagos and Achimota, and now, by the instructions of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, has been medically examined at Lagos, duly passed, and exempted from further examination at landing in the United Kingdom. Mr. Ajayi is expected by the Accra next week, and is to take up a course of study at Reading University.”²⁶⁵ The manner in which he pursued his objectives was so unrelenting that it compelled an administrator at the Colonial Office to declare, “I don’t know whether you are, but I certainly am getting rather tired of this fellow!”²⁶⁶

In order to cover his costs at university, Ajayi sent several letters to Vischer asking to be considered for a government scholarship.²⁶⁷ When he did not receive confirmation of a scholarship, Ajayi met in person with Hazlerigg at the Secretary of State for the Colonies and Vischer at the Colonial Office shortly after beginning his courses at Reading. After his meeting with Vischer, he sent a follow up letter in which he restated his desire to secure a scholarship and outlined his qualifications. The internal memo from Vischer stated, “I received the attached from our friend. Mr. Ajayi, who, when he called here after he had called on you, mentioned his keen desire to get a

a copy of his medical report dated June 27, 1933 to Hanns Vischer on June 30, 1933 in which he restated his request for permission to land in the U.K. without a second medical examination. In a letter from the Governor of Nigeria to Philip Cunliffe-Lister at the Secretary of State for the Colonies, July 7, 1933, confirmed that Ajayi’s medical examination was clear and he had 12 BP and 10 shilling per month for 6 months to support himself in England.

²⁶⁵ “A Nigerians Hard Experiences of Immigration and Alien Laws and Practices.” *West Africa*, September 23, 1933.

²⁶⁶ Memo from Hazlerigg to Hanns Vischer, June 19, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

²⁶⁷ On May 27, 1933, Ajayi sent a letter to Hanns Vischer from Achimota College in the Gold Coast in which he requested assistance in obtaining a scholarship for his studies in the U.K. He reiterated his request for a scholarship and financial compensation for being wrongly “expelled” from the U.K. in June 1933. Letter from Ajayi to Hanns Vischer, June 27, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933. This issue would not be resolved until Ajayi reached London in October 1933.

scholarship.²⁶⁸ In a letter to the Secretary of State, Vischer stated, “I told him then and there that this was a matter for the Nigerian Government and no good purpose would be served by his approaching the Secretary of State or this Office. As you know he has made enough noise already about his trouble when he got here last year, but the fact remains that the whole affair and his inability to go to Hampton where it would have been cheaper than at Reading has cost him a certain amount of money.”²⁶⁹ It was finally decided that because Ajayi was not a graduate, he was not qualified to apply for a post-graduate scholarship. The only government scholarship fund that he might have had access was from the Government of Nigeria.²⁷⁰

Despite his not receiving a scholarship, Ajayi completed his degree at Reading and was offered a - in Nigeria with the Department of Agriculture in 1935. In order to pay for his return home, he sent a letter to the Elder Dempster Lines shipping company requesting a reduced fare. He sent a copy of this letter to Vischer asking him to provide a recommendation on his behalf.²⁷¹ In his letter to the company, Vischer described Ajayi as “a very nice fellow personally full of unbounded enthusiasm for the progress of his

²⁶⁸ On October 4, 1933, he sent another letter to Mr. Hanns Vischer asking for his assistance with obtaining an agricultural scholarship from the government. In this letter he outlined his accomplishments and qualifications. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

²⁶⁹ Vischer to Hazlerigg, October 5, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

²⁷⁰ In an internal memo, Vischer explained, “We only have post-graduate scholarships to offer. Scholars must be ready to go to any post to which they may be allotted. We should not take a man who has a wife & three children. Mr. Ajayi should be told this if he ever asks about our post-graduate scholarships! Seeing that in recent years there have been over 100 applicants annually for scholarship the question whether a student is likely to be rejected is quite a different one of the question whether he can be regarded as eligible – which is the sort of thing he would be likely to wish to discuss.” Hanns Vischer, Colonial Office, October 5, 1933. The issue was still being debated in a month later at which time it was finally determined that Ajayi was not qualified for one of the Colonial Agriculture Scholarships. Memo, November 4, 1933. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

²⁷¹ On September 18, 1935 Ajayi sent a letter to Mr. Vischer thanking him for the previous day’s interview with Vischer. He attached a letter that he had sent to the Elder Dempster Lines requesting assistance with his fare for his return to Nigeria. If his request was denied, he asked that the Colonial Office book his return fare and deduct the amount from his wages after his return to Nigeria, or ask the company to do the same on his behalf. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

people and a hard worker” and “worth all the assistance that can be given him.”²⁷² Elder Dempster upgraded Ajayi’s ticket to Second Saloon accommodation without an increase in his fare.²⁷³

The case of Ajayi offers insight into the ways that travel between locations within imperial and Atlantic worlds created opportunities for new citizenship practices to emerge that might otherwise have not been available had these students never left the coast of West Africa. It demonstrates the ways that travel brought students into direct confrontation with imperial institutions, and in this way demonstrated the Empire’s many divisions. It also illustrates how West African students used the very structures designed to oppose their political, social, and economic advancement, to argue for rights and recognition within the Empire.

²⁷² Vischer added that Ajayi’s younger brother studied engineering at Bristol and had the same commitment to “helping in the development of the Africans.” Letters from Hanns Vischer, September 24 and October 5, 1935 to Major G. F. Torey at the Elder Dempster Lines. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E. S. Ajayi.” 1933.

²⁷³ Letter from Elder Dempster Lines to Mr. Hanns Vischer, October 8, 1935. CO 583-187-16. “Native Student. E.S. Ajayi.” 1933.

Chapter 4
From Lombard Street, London to High Street, Accra:
Introducing Accra's Public Sphere of Clubs and Newspapers

“You cannot import Lombard Street to High Street, Accra, overnight. First you have to know whether it is possible, and if it is, how best to do it.”²⁷⁴

— J. B. Danquah, President, West African Students' Union, *Wasu*, March 1926.

Western scholarship proclaims modernity a European and North American phenomenon, the creation of white men and white institutions. The image of Accra gleaned from the West African-owned press of the 1930s challenges these Eurocentric assumptions. As one of several important cities of exchange within the British Empire, Accra's economy and residents were connected to New York, Kingston, Liverpool, Portsmouth, London, Cape Town, Freetown, and Lagos, as well as to other European and colonial port cities, all of which were connected by British imperial and Atlantic trade networks. Like other Atlantic port cities, Accra's geographical boundaries flowed in and out of the world's oceans. Shipping companies provided Accra's residents with a fast and easy way to connect with and engage the world as travelers, but also as consumers of international and imperial products, and cultures purveyed by the mail. Indeed,

²⁷⁴ Lombard Street, located in the historic core of London, signified the wealth of the Italian merchants in London. The area was first granted by King Edward I to goldsmiths from the Lombardy region of Italy. Until the 1980s, the street was known for its many banks and money lenders, namely Barclay's Bank and Lloyd's of London. Lombard Street, London, Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lombard_Street,_London (accessed June 23, 2008).

international mail service enabled Accra's, and to a large extent West Africa's, cosmopolitan aspirations.

During a typical week, residents could anticipate mail from cities in England, Germany, France, Canada, and the United States. They posted letters to their friends and families abroad; they ordered books, clothing, radios and gramophone records from London.²⁷⁵ African students, unable to pursue degrees in higher education in the United Kingdom and the United States, earned diplomas by mail through postal degree courses offered by the University of London and Cambridge University.²⁷⁶ African business entrepreneurs relied on the postal service to stock their shops with foreign products and to show the latest films from the United States at their movie houses. Indeed, sending, receiving, and expecting mail from around the world was a routine feature of the lives of Accra's residents. The daily arrivals and departures of ships, people, and information extended Accra's urban environment, and cultivated a cosmopolitan mentality (and desire) among the city's residents. This was especially true of the city's literary-minded residents, the majority of whom had some educational training in English and were well-positioned to take advantage of the constant circulation of people, products, news, and

²⁷⁵ Martin Summers has written about a transatlantic relationship that developed through the mail between an African man and an African American man during the 1930s—Accra resident and teacher D. K. Abadu-Bentsi and New York City resident and postal worker Harry A. Williamson. See Martin Summers, "Diasporic Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Traditional Production of Black Middle-class Masculinity," *Gender and History* 15, 3 (2003), 550-574.

²⁷⁶ For a more detailed history of the Cambridge Certificate in the colonies, see A. J. Stockwell, "Examinations and Empire: The Cambridge Certificate in the Colonies, 1857-1957." In *Making Imperial Mentalities. Socialisation and British Imperialism*, edited by J. A. Mangan, 203-220. A university in West Africa did not exist at this time, and the building of a university was a primary source of debate between western-educated West Africans and colonial and imperial governments and committees throughout the colonial period. In order to obtain a degree in higher education, students had to study at universities abroad, usually in the U.K., though in the mid-1930s; studying in the U.S. was becoming increasingly popular (the fees to study at U.S. universities were much lower than the fees charged by U.K. universities at this time).

ideas.²⁷⁷ For those who could afford it, using the passenger boats to travel between cities in West Africa and to the United Kingdom and the United States was also becoming increasingly common.²⁷⁸ Residents could sail from Accra to Portsmouth, England in twelve days, and they could expect their mail to be delivered within the same time frame—the world, it seemed, lay at the feet of Accra’s residents.²⁷⁹

The establishment of the African urban popular-style press in the early 1930s marked the beginning of an exciting and transformative period in the history of Gold Coast journalism. As described by historian K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, the press of the thirties changed from an exclusive elite press to a popular-style urban press.²⁸⁰ This transformation began with the founding of Accra’s first daily paper, the *West Africa Times*, followed by the establishment of several other newspapers, all of which were modeled after the popular British dailies of the 1920s. Accra’s popular press of the 1930s accommodated a wider-range of news and information, and critically, it encouraged readers’ active engagement with newspaper debates and, in turn, it facilitated dialogue between readers and writers on issues critical to the formation of West African nationhood.

Jones-Quartey attributes the founding of the popular press to the arrival of intellectuals in Accra, particularly J. B. Danquah, Mabel Dove, and Nnamdi Azikiwe.

²⁷⁷ African Newspapers documented the Atlantic network to which Accra belonged by featuring daily reports of ship arrivals and departures, as well as international and imperial news, connecting Accra to the rest of the world.

²⁷⁸ While the majority of residents would never leave the coast of West Africa, it was not unusual for Africans to travel to the neighboring coastal towns of Lagos, Freetown or Bathurst. Travel beyond the coast of West Africa, though, remained limited to seamen, wealthy merchants, and the educated elite.

²⁷⁹ This information was obtained from shipping company advertisements that appeared in the *West Africa Times* in 1931.

²⁸⁰ K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, *A Summary History of the Ghana Press, 1822-1960* (Accra: Ghana Information Services Dept, 1974). This shift is also discussed in Jones-Quartey, *History, Politics and Early Press in Ghana: The Fictions and the Facts* (Accra, Ghana: Jones-Quartey, 1975).

Stephanie Newell's research shows how locally-educated readers participated in the making of this new style of press as readers and letter writers. Both groups, intellectuals and locally-educated men, were critical to the making of a new urban press, but the motivation for its founding, I argue, lay with the political and cultural projects associated with WASU in London. Thus, I propose that the new urban press and the conversations that took place within it (around gender, women, modernity, sexuality and nation) are best understood within a broader framework that accounts for West Africans (particularly students) traveling within and between London and the coastal cities of West Africa. The historical development of a "West African" public sphere in Accra during the interwar period, was, therefore, intimately tied to the educational experiences of African students in London.

As the opening quotation from J. B. Danquah suggests, WASU students returned to the colonies eager to develop their West African nationhood. Accra was a particularly attractive destination for this cohort. The once booming intellectual town just west of Accra, Cape Coast, was less appealing to this particular cohort of students. The educated elite of Cape Coast were mainly Fante (most were trained in law). This group had a long history of working closely with Europeans, and in some cases they supported Fante nationalism and served as African chiefs.²⁸¹ The political project to found a West African nation worked against ethnic factions and nationalisms, and favored unity across ethnic, religious, and geographical spaces. Accra offered a more promising atmosphere for this kind of nationalism to develop. As it was named the capital of the Gold Coast in 1877, and as railways and roads connected the mining and agricultural industries to the

²⁸¹ Edsman, Björn M. *Lawyers in Gold Coast Politics C. 1900-1945: From Mensah Sarbah to J.B. Danquah*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 111. Uppsala: Univ, 1979.

city, people from all over the country, region, and Empire poured into the city in search of employment. This was especially true during the cocoa boom of the early 1920s. By the beginning of the 1930s, the city's population was mixed, and included European and Lebanese traders, British administrators, university-educated West Africans (from all four countries), locally-educated men and woman (usually Christian converts) from the surrounding villages, Muslim traders, and migrant African workers from all over the region. The concentration of newly arrived people from around the globe added to Accra's freshness, and for WASU students returning from London, Accra offered the perfect environment in which to introduce new their vision for a united West African nation.

While Accra's English-literate group was mixed and included people from all ethnic groups, the Ga, the indigenous ethnic group of Accra, maintained a strong presence in the city throughout the colonial period. Different from the Fante in Cape Coast, however, fewer Ga townsmen and women had degrees in higher education, and those who did tended to convert to Christianity and were less involved in Ga affairs.²⁸² Thus, the majority of Ga people did not involve themselves in the legal and administrative aspects of the colonial capital. When the British colonial government made Accra the capital, and as more people from different backgrounds (and with their own plans for the city) arrived in Accra, the Ga people responded by strengthening their presence in the areas near the sea, Ussher Town, James Town, and Osu, and further

²⁸² John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death and Burial in Early Colonial Accra," in *Africa's Urban Past*, ed., David Anderson and Richard Rathbone (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999): 212-13.

defining insider status within the Ga community.²⁸³ For the Ga, “Accra represented the political, cultural and sacral epicenter of the Ga world.”²⁸⁴ For centuries, they had dominated the fishing industry, and had struggled with the British (and western-educated Africans and Christian missionaries) to maintain political, spiritual, and economic control of their community and land.²⁸⁵ For British colonials, Accra was “an essentially European domain, unfit for a ‘proper’ African state.”²⁸⁶ They argued that African affairs “were best conducted in the bush, not in the urban showcase of expatriate enterprise and ordered modernity.”²⁸⁷ Western-educated Africans, especially Christian converts, were interested in the colonial vision of Accra as a “modern” urban town. This was especially true for the WASU students who returned to Accra during the early 1930s. Western-educated Africans worked hard to establish a presence in municipal affairs. However, owing to British colonial officials’ tendency to view the colonial city as a European domain, this group used other avenues as well, including newspapers and clubs to participate in town politics and to practice “co-operative” leadership with the British government.

As discussed in Chapter 2, critical to WASU students’ political and cultural aspirations was the formation of a united West African nation (similar to a West African commonwealth of nations) that could form part of a British commonwealth of nations. In

²⁸³ Parker, John, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000), 196.

²⁸⁴ Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death and Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 211.

²⁸⁵ At this time, John Parker notes that there was tension between Accra as a colonial city and Accra as an African urban center. The tension lay between colonial officials, Christian missionaries, and Christian African elite on the one hand, and the Ga who resisted Christianity and colonial laws around burial and marriage practices. “The Cultural Politics of Death and Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” in *Africa’s Urban Past*, edited by David Anderson and Richard Rathbone (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 211.

²⁸⁶ Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death and Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 211.

²⁸⁷ Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death and Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” 211.

their efforts to increase their authority at the municipal level, and to eventually argue for self-government, WASU students self-consciously stimulated the development of a visible group of educated and engaged “West African” citizens in the colonial cities that could contribute to the making of a self-governed united West African nation. The presence of an educated West African citizenry was critical to the educated elites’ argument for self-government. The bustling environment and diverse population of Accra, especially the presence and activities of newly arrived grammar school graduates, and the already vibrant press and club scene made Accra the perfect environment for WASU students like J. B. Danquah to carry out their political and cultural agenda. However, the press would first have to be reformed from a pre-existing press (of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century) that catered exclusively to African elites and ethnic nationalisms to a more capacious popular-style press that covered a wider range of issues encouraged readers of all levels to participate in national debate through the submission of letters and free-lance articles.

The new urban press of the 1930s (along with social, political and literary clubs that came together to form a West African public sphere), I argue, was particularly instrumental to the West African students’ political and cultural project to promote West African nationhood in the colonies that had at its center an educated citizenry of men and women readers and writers. The popular-style press was well-suited to the WASU students’ goal of cultivating this type of educated citizenry. With its open spaces, particularly letters to the editor sections, its acceptance of freelance articles, and its provocation and encouragement of public debate, the new press allowed locally-educated (mainly men) to engage with the educated elite (men and women) on what they called

“modern” social problems in the press, but also in the clubhouses of Accra (the activities of which were often reported on in the press). The urban press became a key location for elite and non-elite readers to practice and to cultivate a type of “citizenship” practices and claim-making possibilities not available through the channels of indirect rule. Both the African chieftaincy and the colonial government did not offer spaces for educated West Africans to discuss social problems and to develop their own ideas about the future of the region.

Educated West Africans’ founding of the new urban press and their extension of the West African public sphere in Accra during the 1930s allowed for the emergence of “new types of political subjects and new spatialities for politics.”²⁸⁸ The practices of citizenship engaged by members of this emergent and diverse citizenry helped to project a powerful image of educated West African public opinion (or a visible “claim-making group” that was separate from the colonial administration and chieftaincy) in the city.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Saskia Sassen discusses a similar process of the emergence of new political subjects and political spaces among “unauthorized” immigrants in “global cities.” “The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics.” *The New Centennial Review* 3, 2 (2003), 42.

²⁸⁹ In his introduction to *Theory and Society*’s special issue of recasting citizenship and in his article in the same issue, Michael Hanagan refers to various groups, legally recognized citizens and non-citizens that formed pressure groups or political coalitions as “claim-making populations.” “Recasting Citizenship: Introduction.” *Theory and Society* 26, 4, Special Issue of Recasting Citizenship (August, 1997): 397-40. In his article on working class Briton’s arguments for the right to work, Hanagan describes them as “working-class claim-makers,” that cultivated social and political identities to argue for rights. As Hanagan points out, these groups were gendered (consisting mainly of men). “Citizenship, Claim-Making, and the Right to Work: Britain, 1884-1911.” *Theory and Society* 26, 4, Special Issue of Recasting Citizenship (August, 1997): 449-474. It is possible to also view the West African students’ Union as forming a “claim-making” group (and other African groups in London at different points in time, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation). They developed social and political identities that helped them to build a platform from which to present their political claims for self-government, which in this case revolved around the creation of a united West African nation (or mini-commonwealth) to join a future British commonwealth as a self-governing united nation. The concept claim-making group is similar to Frederick Cooper’s discussion of issue networks, though coalitions built around specific issues, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, for example. These issues networks were pointed in their agenda and often dissolved after specific goals had been met or were no longer viable options. Transnational or international issue networks, though, helped stimulate the creation affinities between diverse groups of people. “What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian’s Perspective.” *African Affairs* 100, 399 (April, 2001), 207-11. Also see, Thomas Faist and Eyüp

The educated elite took advantage of the much larger and more heterogeneous group of English-literate “claim-makers” of the 1930s to lobby the colonial administration for changes at municipal, colonial, territorial, and regional levels. Illustrating this type of citizenship were the regular meetings between Africans and Europeans at the elite African Rodger Club. At these meetings the educated elite listened to governors’ proposals and had ample opportunity within this space to pose questions and introduce modifications. The conversations that took place within the elite space of the Rodger Club moved into the mixed space of the popular press through the publication of meeting summaries and minutes along with opinion pieces. It was not uncommon for these types of articles to stimulate additional debate through the publication of readers’ letters and editorials (see Chapter 5). The press was critical to educated West Africans’ claim-making possibilities vis-à-vis the British colonial government. The press also provided the educated elite with a daily opportunity to showcase an emergent group of English-literate and engaged citizens, and in turn, strengthen their argument for self-rule.

The popular press, however, did not operate alone. In the 1930s it combined with an already vibrant literary club scene and a growing assortment of new forms of social and leisure time venues in the city—from bookshops to cinemas. These various elements of what I am calling a West African public sphere were interactive. The space of the newspapers commented on what was happening in the clubs, dance halls, and cinemas, and issues raised in the papers were further developed in these public spaces. I use the concept of a “West African” public sphere to discuss these spaces as part of the same economy of meaning making that joined London to Accra, and to indicate that these

Ozveren. *Transnational Social Spaces: Agents, Networks, and Institutions*. Research in migration and ethnic relations series (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004).

connected (and overlapping) spaces within this sphere (newspapers, dance halls, and club meetings) were deeply interactive and formed a critical arena of meaning making. The West African public sphere of Accra was, I argue, the primary location in which students returning from London, in dialogue with locally-educated Africans and British administrators, extended the political and cultural projects they developed through WASU in London.

My understanding of the public sphere derives from Habermas's understanding of the public sphere as a space of political and cultural engagement that was not tied to a government structure, but was capable of staging political and cultural debate and discussion.²⁹⁰ Like the European bourgeois public sphere charted by Habermas, the West African public sphere sat between colonial and imperial governments, and fell outside the domain of the African chieftaincy. Actors within the West African public sphere, therefore, were not necessarily indebted to any particular governmental organization and, instead, formed their own "public opinion" (or "claim-making" group) in the city that could lobby all international, imperial, colonial, and African groups. Moreover, different from the exclusive and bourgeois public sphere described by Habermas, the West African public sphere of Accra was much more cosmopolitan and diverse. It facilitated dialogue between readers and writers from different ethnic, religious, and geographical locations, and with varied educational backgrounds (particularly in Accra).

The West African public sphere was a performative and competitive space, and was the key location in which class difference within the educated group was articulated

²⁹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article" (1964), *New German Critique* 1, 3 (Fall, 1974), 49-50 and Peter Hohendahl. "Jürgen Habermas: 'The Public Sphere'" (1964), *New German Critique* 1, 3 (Fall, 1974), 46-47.

(see Chapter 5). Through newspapers and social venues, western-educated men and women kept up with the latest news, information, literature, films, records, and dance steps from all parts of the world, and created new hobbies and interest. Catering to (and, at the same time, inspiring) their yen to be in touch with the world (a predominately an Atlantic world) was Accra's new urban press (established at the beginning of the 1930s) that reported on local, imperial, and international news and included analyses of newly released books and films and the latest fashions from Paris and London. These papers routinely published readers' letters, allowing for a wider variety of opinions to be expressed and in many cases instigating controversy and debate. Equally important to western-educated Africans were the numerous literary, debating, and social clubs that blossomed during the second half of the 1920s. Other activities that took place within the West African public sphere were musical, theatrical, and dance performances that reproduced, and in many cases, adapted works by Shakespeare, Gilbert and Sullivan, and Cervantes. And, as will be discussed again at length in Chapter 5, it was also a competitive space in which educated elite Africans separated themselves from locally-educated readers as members of exclusive "Society," as they simultaneously encouraged this group of readers to emulate their lifestyle and to adopt their vision of nationhood.

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a picture of Accra's West African public sphere as told from the perspective of its participants. That is, in my recreation of Accra in the 1930s, I rely almost exclusively how it was represented by western-educated Africans in the African-owned daily and weekly papers, primarily the *West Africa Times*, the *Gold Coast Spectator*, and the *Gold Coast Independent*. I use these papers to describe the structure of the public sphere and its participants, and examine how this

sphere supported dialogue between educated readers and writers. I argue that the dialogues they engaged in this sphere, particularly around gender and class, were critical to the production of nationhood at this time. This is not an attempt to offer a comprehensive history of urban Accra, but is instead an attempt to recreate the public sphere that African readers and writers were representing and creating in their newspapers. This chapter sets the stage for the following chapters of this dissertation in which I discuss how class and gender meaning were produced in the West African public sphere, and how these discussions were critical to the project of nation making during the thirties. Before launching into their public sphere as displayed in the newspapers, let me offer a brief introduction to Accra.

In 1877, Accra was named the capital city of the British Gold Coast. It was composed of several distinct quarters that changed over time. In the early 1930s, James Town, Ussher Town, Osu, and Christianborg located near the port were among the oldest sections of Accra. Victoriaborg was among the more affluent neighborhoods. Its residents, mainly European and elite Africans, enjoyed easy access to the many restaurants, American style bars, hotels, cinemas, department stores, petrol stations, and other structures that filled its main roads.²⁹¹ Residents could also find restaurants and bars near the Court House and Post Office. In February 1932, the “London Restaurant and American Bar” opened at Liverpool House opposite the general Post Office. The proprietors, Theodore Taylor and Company, were prepared to “cater for first class

²⁹¹ The main roads in the center of town were Horse Road, Derby Ave, Station Road, and Dodowa Road. John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra*, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000). Additional information obtained from advertisements in West African newspapers from the 1930s that listed shop and street names.

Africans and Europeans.”²⁹² By the mid-1920s, residential neighborhoods had developed further inland, including an established Muslim community known as the Sabon Zongo, an exclusive European neighborhood called the Ridge, and a newly formed middle class African neighborhood at Adabraka. Government buildings were located in Christianborg and Victoriaborg, including the Governor’s residence and center of the colonial administration at Christianborg Castle, the main Court House, government offices, and post office. Victoriaborg also contained a telephone exchange, horse racing track, churches, and public library (after 1936).²⁹³

On the outskirts of the city were mission and government schools, two cemeteries, a psychiatric hospital, a new medical hospital at Korle Lagoon, and a new college (K through Standard VII) at Achimota. Accra’s railway station and harbor saw the daily arrival and departure of people, raw materials, and commercial products. Roads crisscrossed the city and additional roadways were constructed during the 1920s and 1930s to facilitate the movement of raw material and labor from the Ashanti region and northern territory to the coastal towns. Using these roadways were business owners and residents who took advantage of the numerous cars and lorry trucks available for hire, as well as the small number of residents who owned private cars. A writer for the *West*

²⁹² Prices were described as reasonable. “London Restaurant and American Bar,” *Times of West Africa*, February 5-6, 1932, 1. In the same issue, the paper announced the opening of the Accra Central Bar on Station Road, formerly known as the Gold Coast Bar. The opening attracted a large crowd.

²⁹³ Accra Races, a horse racing track, was located in Osu (also identified on the 1925 map as Victoriaborg) just south of the European neighborhood called the Ridge. The Korle Bu Hospital was built near the Korle Lagoon, on the north-west side of town. The Prince of Wales College was built at Achimota, a few miles north-east of the town center. The College was large and contained a comprehensive grammar school, grades K through Standard VII and a teacher’s training college. Government offices and the colonial courts, including a Supreme Court, were located in Christiansborg and Osu (Victoriaborg). The main post office was located at Horse Road.

Africa Times reported on the rare treat of driving a private car, a “Ford Sedan of the latest model,” to the Accra Youngsters dance in the summer of 1931.²⁹⁴

Accra’s commercial sector was diverse and well developed. Describing a typical scene near the department stores on a Saturday in Accra, “Marjorie Mensah” for the “Ladies’ Corner” of the *West Africa Times* wrote, “It reminds me of shopping somewhere in the West End of London.” She was thrilled to see “all the large and luxurious cars, ranging from an expensive Saloon down to the modest Ford Tourer, and the collection of women of all shades and class exciting themselves over the tempting niceties of a U.A.C. display.” She herself was filled with temptation as she entered the “beautiful portals” of the Kingsway, which had “got up a la mode, West End,” climbing the carpeted with the greatest caution” to find a “neat, inexpensive ready-made frock.”²⁹⁵ At Christmas time, Station Road and parts of High Street, especially in the area near the Kingsway, were flooded with people. The excitement “gave the whole place an aspect of somewhere in the West End of London, the Bond Street, Oxford Street and the Circus area.”²⁹⁶ The European-owned Kingsway and the United Africa Company (U.A.C.) department stores sold a range of imported goods, and the oldest and largest book shop in town, the Methodist Book Depot, carried books in English and indigenous languages, maps, pens, calendars, transistor radios, notebooks and wrist watches. Gramophone records could be ordered by post and were popular among Europeans. An advertisement for records by

²⁹⁴ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, July 6-7, 1931, 2.

²⁹⁵ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 1, 1931, 2.

²⁹⁶ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, December 23, 1931, 2.

post announced, “Europeans stationed in the outlying parts of the Colony [were] keeping in touch with civilization by ordering ‘His Master’s Voice.’”²⁹⁷

Local and international news could also be found in one of the many African-owned daily and weekly newspapers that were available at school libraries, book depots, and by subscription. In 1936, the Librarian at Achimota College observed that an increasing number of people were reading the papers at the College library.²⁹⁸ The majority of these papers were written in English, though a limited number of papers written in an Akan language were also published at this time. Another important source of news and information was the radio, which, in the early 1930s, was only beginning to be available in the Gold Coast. Transistor radios were fairly new to the area. For those who could afford them, the BBC offered a regular news program in English.²⁹⁹ Accra also had a number of import-export companies, clothing stores, tailors, small supply shops, open-air markets, chemists, book depots, cinemas, car repair shops, and petrol stations run by Africans, Europeans, Indians, and Syrians. Salaga and Selwyn Markets were the two main trading venues where hundreds of local “market women” sold provisions, cloth, and household items.³⁰⁰ Stand alone shops tended to be owned by men, and newspaper reports indicate that Syrians owned a large percentage of small shops in the city.

²⁹⁷ “Gramophone records by post,” The Accra Gramophone Depot, *West Africa Times*, May 13, 1931, 3.

²⁹⁸ Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: How to Play the Game of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 22.

²⁹⁹ A letter to the editor in the London-based magazine *West Africa* suggests that Europeans in West Africa owned radios and were eager to see more programs added to the schedule. A letter of complaint from “Adsum” of Accra was sent to *West Africa*. Adsum was annoyed with the “enthusiastic amateur,” who he called “knob-twiddlers,” which he claimed worked his “set at all hours, even up to two or three a.m.” “Knobb-Twiddlers.” To the Editor of *West Africa*, Adsum, Accra, *West Africa*, June 9, 1934, 623. “BBC Schedule,” *Gold Coast Independent*, November 4, 1933.

³⁰⁰ Parker, *Making the Town*. On market women, see also Gracia Clark, *Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

The social life of the town revolved around literary and debating clubs, as well as restaurants, bars, dance and concert halls, cabarets, nightclubs, and cinemas. These clubs and venues were by no means homogenous, but catered to the city's diverse literary-minded and mostly English-literate group of Africans, as well as Europeans and other ex-patriots. The more exclusive clubs and entertainment venues were patronized by university-educated African professionals, colonial administrators, and wealthy African and European merchants. These included the Rodger Club, Accra Club,³⁰¹ Palladium Cinema, Accra Races, Local Grand Hotel, American Bar, and Christiansborg Castle. Providing regular commentary on and analysis of this vibrant urban environment were the African-owned daily and weekly newspapers that proliferated during the 1930s.

This brief sketch of Accra would hardly be complete without referencing the impact Christianity had on the city's landscape and residents. Centuries of missionary activity in the southern region had resulted in the establishment of numerous mission schools and churches. The majority of Accra's literary-minded and English-literate residents had some experience or affiliation with Christianity, either as students of the mission schools and/or as members of a local church. Churches and schools provided residents with places to hold club meetings, including bible study, but also secular meetings and weddings. Among western-educated Africans, wedding ceremonies at a Christian church were a sign of wealth and education. African couples from wealthy families married at one of the more established churches in Accra, the Holy Trinity Church, Church of the Sacred Heart, and Wesleyan Chapel; marriage ceremonies were followed by receptions at the Rodger Club and the Palladium. These weddings were

³⁰¹ The Accra Club was a European social club.

announced in the local papers, and couples from established coastal families received considerable attention in the form of front page headlines and descriptive articles, including the weddings of Miss Dorothy Lamiley Vanderpuye (daughter of Barlett Vanderpuye) and Mr. Willie Edujae Wood,³⁰² Miss Marion Adeline Dove (daughter of distinguished lawyer Francis Dove) and Mr. Solomon Edmund Odamtten,³⁰³ and Miss Phyllis Ribeiro and Dr. Savage of Lagos (son of distinguished Cape Coast doctor).³⁰⁴ All of these weddings took place at the Holy Trinity Church.³⁰⁵

Accra's West African Public Sphere

Accra's West African public sphere of the 1930s consisted of newspapers and a variety of literary public spaces, the most critical being the social, literary and debating clubs, but also book depots, dance halls, libraries, sporting venues, churches, and schools. The newspapers provided readers with detailed discussions of club meetings, acting "as the loudhailer, transmitting literary material from the debating platform of the clubroom into the printed realm of the newspaper"; in turn, newspaper content, especially controversial issues raised in the press, was discussed at club meetings.³⁰⁶ These two

³⁰² *Gold Coast Independent*, May 9 1931, 591.

³⁰³ *Gold Coast Independent*, May 23, 1931, 655.

³⁰⁴ *Times of West Africa*, April 19, 1933, 1.

³⁰⁵ The Ribeiros family was among the more prominent Brazilian families in Accra. The Ribeiros established themselves as part of the upper classes of Accra. Members of their family married into the Cleland, a prominent Accra family and also the family of the famous Methodist Thomas Birch Freeman. Roger Gocking, *Facing Two Ways: Ghana's Coastal Communities Under Colonial Rule* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1999), 129.

³⁰⁶ Stephanie Newell, "Entering the Territory of Elites: Literary Activity in Colonial Ghana," *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and the Making of the Self*, Karin Barber, ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 231.

realms that made up the public sphere, the realm of discourse and rhetoric associated with the newspapers, and the daily activities occurring in the literary spaces of the city, constituted a powerful arena of meaning making that, during the 1930s, was the crucial site of exchange for Accra's literary-minded residents. Here, African writers, readers, and clubgoers with diverse educational histories and levels of proficiency in English language and literature engaged in a productive dialogue with each other, constituting identities as modern African men and women, and imagining the future of Africa.

Attempting to take charge of this process were the more affluent and university-educated members of Accra's literary-minded group—namely the students discussed in previous chapters who had been active members of the West African Students' Union in London. West African students returning from abroad used the popular press, and the cultural capital that came with their having studied abroad, to facilitate dialogue between readers and writers in order to encourage the emergence of a visible, educated citizenry of a future West African nation. At the same time, they used their control over the press to position themselves as members of an elite and exclusive group capable of leading young citizens to self-government. The process of encouraging unity and identification in the press, while creating class difference, formed not only between readers and writers, but also with British and world audiences in mind. Central to their performance of their ability to engage in self-government and their showcasing of a critical mass of educated citizens was the creation of a “civilized” and worldly African identity and culture that

they had begun to develop in London. As with WASU in London, the African identities they formed were argued to be distinctly African and modern.³⁰⁷

The creation of a West African Identity and culture were fundamental to this cohort's political agenda for a postcolonial future. Indirect rule, and the "traditional" African culture being constructed by Britain at this time, was a powerful source of motivation for this group and their political and cultural projects; however, it was not the only factor influencing the types of projects they formed at this time. The African identity and culture formed in the West African public sphere of the 1930s was multiply influenced, having roots in a world modernity articulated within the international networks of the 1920s, and the political projects of the National Congress of British West Africa and the West African Students' Union. Specifically, this identity grew from their respective visions for a self-governing West African nation within a British commonwealth of nations, that were, in part, influenced by empire-wide discussions of imperial reform associated with the colonial and imperial conferences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the ideas associated with dominion nationalists, especially imperial reforms proposed by "Lord Milner's kindergarten," also known as the round table group.³⁰⁸

Further complicating their political and cultural projects were the opinions and actions of the locally-educated grammar school graduates (primarily men) who frequently

³⁰⁷ Defining traditional Africa was complicated. In the Gold Coast, where multiple ethnic groups existed, which ethnic group would serve as the blueprint for traditional culture? Asante, Fante, Ga? The same tension can be seen in the *Wasu* magazine of the West African Students' Union in London. As part of their project of defining a West African identity and culture, they published several articles on the customs and practices of different ethnic groups, though the Igbo of Nigeria tended to dominate representations of "tradition" in their magazine.

³⁰⁸ For a discussion of J. E. Casely Hayford's engagement with Lord Milner's group see Ian Fletcher, "Double Meanings: Nation and Empire in the Edwardian Era." In *After the Imperial Turn, Thinking With and Through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 246-259.

proved that the university-educated elite were not the only literary-minded Africans interested in defining Africa. During the 1920s and 1930s, they inserted themselves into the educated elites' construction of culture by submitting letters and articles to the local papers, creating their own social and literary clubs, and taking part in public debates. The educated elite had no choice but to contend with the opinions of this increasingly visible class of locally-educated grammar school graduates, who they were attempting to reform in their own image, while simultaneously articulating their class identity against this group, as members of an exclusive Accra "Society."³⁰⁹ Locally-educated readers' engagement with the press and clubs forced university-educated professionals to revise and sharpen their constructions of an educated urbane African identity and future (a sharpening that involved the construction of difference between society and local classes, as will be discussed in Chapter 5). The construction of new identities, cultures, and political futures in the Gold Coast press and clubs (that reached beyond local "ethnic" identities, and, in fact, resisted ethnic affiliations) was a dialogic multi-voiced process that took place among a diverse group of English-literate readers and writers.

Accra's Social, Literary and Debating Societies

Holding public meetings, debates, dances, and performances in a variety of public spaces throughout the city were the numerous African literary, social, religious, and debating clubs. Research on clubs in the British Gold Coast has explored the political, social, and cultural function of clubs. As Augustus Casely-Hayford and Richard

³⁰⁹ As defined in the *West Africa Times*, see "Diary of a Man About Town," July 10-13, 1931.

Rathbone have explained in their article on Freemasonry in the Gold Coast, several scholars, including David Kimble, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Thomas Hodgkin, view clubs as replacements and supplements of “older group affiliations as urban people, in particular, embraced new patterns of trade, western education, literacy and, of course, Christianity.”³¹⁰ They describe clubs as practical institutions that helped urban Africans negotiate “traumatic shifts in values, made rural migrants feel more at home in towns and cut across the ascribed exclusivity of ethnic affiliations.”³¹¹ Other scholars have focused on the overt political nature and function of clubs as spaces that facilitated the transcendence of local nationalisms. Some scholars have taken a more practical and individualistic view, seeing clubs as a means of increasing personal social and economic status in the competitive urban environments of the coastal cities. More recently, Stephanie Newell’s research has linked literary and social clubs to the local press to discuss both as part of the production of African literary culture. Her work shows how the cultural productions of western-educated Gold Coasters, while stimulated by Europe, ultimately formed a locally rooted and autonomous literary culture.

My own research builds from Stephanie Newell’s work, especially her discussion of clubs and newspapers as both forming part of a paracolonial network that she argues ran parallel to and intersected with colonial political structures and cultural institutions.³¹² According to Newell, this network created a space in which educated Africans could

³¹⁰ Augustus Casely Hayford and Richard Rathbone, “Politics, Families and Freemasonry in the Colonial Gold Coast,” in *People and Empires in African History: Essays in Memory of Michael Crowder*, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and J. D. Y. Peel (London: Longman, 1992), 143.

³¹¹ According to Casely Hayford and Rathbone, this view is espoused by David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana 1850-1928* (Oxford, 1963), 146-50; Immanuel Wallerstein, “Ethnicity and National Integration in West Africa,” *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines* 3 (October 1960): 129-39; and, Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London, 1956): 84-92. Casely Hayford and Rathbone, “Politics, Families and Freemasonry,” 143.

³¹² Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*.

establish their cultural authority and practice cultural citizenship. I view these networks as forming a West African public sphere that had connections with the larger imperial and Atlantic world associated with students in London, and was locally rooted in Accra. I am especially interested in how the educated elite associated with WASU in London extended these networks in the early 1930s to create a public sphere that staged discussions critical to the formation of nationhood between different groups of educated Africans (see Chapter 4). The West African public sphere that developed at this time was essential to the educated elites' ambition to gain power and authority as West Africans within the Empire and international political circuits.

The West African public sphere of the 1930s staged intellectual debate on “problems of social life,” itself a very modern discussion, and promoted education not as a virtue pursued individuals, but as a window into “. . . a new world.”³¹³ Educated Africans' engagement with clubs and the press was deeply political—it was a way of establishing authority and leadership over the “social life” of the country and its development. Critically, the educated group's discussion of what they called “modern” problems (which were essentially problems associated with urban life, including concerns around women's education, sexuality, employment, and changing marriage and family relationships) were, they argued, problems that *all* “modern” societies faced. The very act of their discussing these problems in the public sphere was a self-conscious performance of this modernity (urbanity) and was evidence of an educated “public opinion” and citizenry.

³¹³ Newell, “Entering the Territory of Elites,” 212.

Of course, those involved in public debate were by no means homogenous. As increasing numbers of western-educated Africans from within the region and empire converged in Accra, they had to construct new identities capable of uniting them politically against indirect rule. Against the colonial government's promotion of Africa as a continent full of ethnic particularities, and as the primitive past of modern societies, western-educated men and women entered this sphere not as Ga, Fante, Ewe, or Asante, but as African social reformers and sometimes as citizens of the British Empire. The drive to create identities that could unite people from diverse backgrounds was a conscious and politically motivated effort among newspaper writers. An illustration of this point is the following quotation from an editorial published in the *Times of West Africa* in 1932,

We are all wedded to one soul idea, one object of life, one practical mode of action which should gradually unite us all in our different activities, in law, in religion, in politics, in business, in social life, in the school, in the state, in our attitude towards government, in the ideology that inspires us to live together through the necessity forced upon us by the geographical grouping of our peoples, but more so, because of the vital fact that we are of one race,--the Negro race,--one people,--the Gold Coast People, and subjects of the same foreign Government,--the British Government.³¹⁴

As this quotation suggests, writers skillfully developed and drew upon a variety of identifications available to them at this time, with West African, Gold Coaster, African, and British being the most commonly expressed. These identities co-existed in the press and were used strategically by different members of the reading community to lobby their points and construct unity (and, at times, difference) among educated Africans, and to further their political goals.

³¹⁴ Editorial, *Times of West Africa*, February 19, 1932, 2.

As readers and writers were redefining themselves through the press, they were also using the literary and social clubs. By the 1920s, Accra clubs represented a range of interests and hobbies and reflected the heterogeneity and changing composition of the English-literate group. This period saw the formation of new clubs at an astonishing rate, many of which disappeared after one or two meetings. The majority of club members were men from “diverse regional backgrounds who identified themselves as ‘literary aspirants’ and potential members of the intelligentsia.”³¹⁵ The selection criteria for club membership was not typically based on ethnic identity, but was instead driven by literacy in English and educational history. In some cases, a minimum level of education was required to join a literary club.

By the beginning of the 1930s, the range of clubs and their composition was diverse. Generally speaking, the less exclusive clubs were composed of men employed as low-ranking civil servants and educationists, merchant and mining clerks, catechists, secretaries, and cocoa-brokers.³¹⁶ Exclusive clubs, such as the Rodger Club and the Ladies’ Musical Society, were composed of high-ranking (African) civil servants and educationists, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals. At this time, clubs most frequently mentioned in the *West Africa Times* and the *Gold Coast Independent* included the Young People’s Literary Club,³¹⁷ Optimist Literary Society, and Cosmo Club.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Newell, “Entering the Territory of Elites,” 213.

³¹⁶ Newell, “Entering the Territory of Elites,” 212-13.

³¹⁷ The Young People’s Literary Club (YPLC) was one of the most vibrant, vigorous, and long lasting clubs (25 years) in Accra. Kwa O. Hagan, “The Literary and Social Clubs of the Past: Their Role in National Awakening in Ghana,” *Okyeame* 4, 2 (June 1969): 83.

³¹⁸ The Cosmo existed for twelve years and the Young Peoples’ for ten years. While more established, these clubs had their share of financial difficulties. Rodger Club members were reported to neglect to pay their fees. An editorial commented in 1931 that while the subscription rate was “only” 2/6 a month, a penny

Also thriving during this period were the Ladies' Musical Society, the Accra Orchestra, and the Presbyterian Choir,³¹⁹ as well as the numerous sporting including the Accra Horse Racing Club, the Tennis Club, and the Cricket Club. Club meetings were held at the Rodger Club, churches, schools, chiefs' palaces, and private residences.³²⁰ Literary and debating clubs like the Optimist Literary Society sponsored public debates, lectures, reading circles, and dances.³²¹ Public debates were well attended and received the most attention from the local press. A debate on marriage hosted by the Young People's Literary Club, for example, inspired numerous letters and articles that were carried by several local newspapers in the early 1930s. In this case, members of the newspaper staff and readers continued their debate of the issue in the editorial and letter sections of the papers, issuing accusations and rebuttals long after the original debate had been staged.³²² The local newspapers also carried articles on sporting clubs and events and provided full analyses of the annual inter-colonial matches.

The character of each club, in terms of its cost, prestige, and membership, differed and not all English-literate residents could afford to join the more expensive and exclusive clubs. Among the more exclusive clubs were the political associations of the Aboriginal Rights Protection Society (ARPS), the National Congress of British West

a day, not everyone was paying their dues. He wrote, "[s]urely everyone of its members is in a position to be able to pay this small amount but they simply will not and yet they expect the club to thrive." "Why Clubs and Societies In Accra Never Last Long?" Editorial, *Gold Coast Independent*, May 9, 1931.

³¹⁹ *Gold Coast Spectator*, Jan 8, 1938.

³²⁰ Methodist School is mentioned as a venue for meeting of the Central National Committee in *The Times of West Africa*, May 11, 1934, 2.

³²¹ An example of a lecture hosted by a literary club: the Reformer's Club sponsored a lecture on "The New Age" by Mr. C. Sterling Acolate, B.A., (barrister). The meeting took place at the residence of Mr. W.M. Alfonso-Brown in Christiansborg. The chair was E. O. Asafu-Adjaye, esq. B.A. (law). *West Africa Times*, April 13, 1931, 1.

³²² Another debate concerned the cocoa industry. In 1931 the Young People's Literary Club held a debate on Cocoa federation and its justification. The debate was staged in James Town at Manche Kojo Ababio's premises. A lawyer held the chair (I.F. Ofori, Esq.). *West Africa Times*, April 13, 1931.

Africa (NCBWA), the Ladies Section of the NCBWA, and the Accra Rate Payers, and the Rodger Club, an elite African social club. Members of these clubs tended to be from the university-educated professional class.³²³ The Rodger Club had an annual subscription fee that prohibited most grammar school graduates from joining. It was managed by a committee of wealthy British educated Africans. In 1932, the Rodger Club committee was led by Mr. J. Kitson Mills who proposed a year of debates, dances, sports, and public lectures.³²⁴

While men were more likely than women to participate in club life, some women attended club meetings and a few women's clubs existed. Similar to men's clubs, women's clubs sponsored charities, music performances, dances, reading circles, and public lectures. Among the clubs mentioned in the newspapers were the Ladies' Musical Society, the Ladies' Section of the NCBWA, the Lady Slater's Club, the Accra Women's Union, and the West African Women's Union. The Ladies' Musical Society offered musical performances and the Ladies Section of the NCBWA sponsored dances and charities.³²⁵ The Lady Slater's Club was founded by Governor Slater's wife, Lady Slater. It provided teas and lectures for African women teachers. The Accra Women's Union was a social reform club. Its members sought to improve women's lives and uplift the

³²³ The Rodger Club had the only billiard table in Accra. *Gold Coast Independent*, May 2, 1931, 562.

³²⁴ *Times of West Africa*, 1, "New Atmosphere at the Rodger Club" February 17, 1932. "Marjorie Mensah" commented on the new agenda for the club in her column. "Ladies' Corner," *Times of West Africa*, February 18, 1932. She supported the changes made by the committee under the direction of Kitson Mills. She urged Kitson Mills to consider adding some features for women, and suggested tennis tournaments, debates on women's topics and other things of literary and social nature. Mr. E. C. Quist held the Chair in 1931. Quist was a barrister and local politician.

³²⁵ In the April 22, 1931 issue of the *West Africa Times*, "Marjorie Mensah" complained that the Ladies' Section of the NCBWA had failed to do anything "useful" for national and social life. She stated that the Section had organized a few dances and charities. She applauded their effort, but argued that it should not be the only outlet for the women of a "young" and "ambitious" country like the Gold Coast. She urged women to focus their efforts on social reform.

race.³²⁶ While not in Accra, another successful women's union was the West African Women's Union of Sekondi (a port town west of Accra) founded in 1930. The Union's mission was to promote discussion of social issues affecting women in different parts of the world.³²⁷ In addition to forming their own clubs, some women participated in mixed-sex literary clubs. The Optimist Literary Society and the Young People's Literary Club had female members and sponsored women's lectures. On April 11, 1931, Mrs. Quarshie Idun gave a lecture on domestic training and the African girl to the Young People's Literary Club.³²⁸ A few months later the Club featured a lecture by Miss Regina Quartey Papafio who presented a paper on child welfare.³²⁹

Club events were frequently organized around books and plays. This is not surprising, considering that reading had long formed a critical component of an educated African identity in the Gold Coast.³³⁰ Readers of all levels of proficiency in English were reported to read the daily and weekly newspapers.³³¹ Newspaper writers discussed reading as more than an intellectual skill; to read was to develop a sense of culture. Through the act of reading, and more importantly, the display of this skill at public meetings and in the press, men and women, according to newspaper writer H. G. Mensah,

³²⁶ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 9, 1931, 2.

³²⁷ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 22, 1931, 2. The Union's President Emma Barnes sent a letter to Mensah announcing the club's aims and recent activities.

³²⁸ *West Africa Times*, April 11, 1931.

³²⁹ *West Africa Times*, November 24, 1931, 1.

³³⁰ See Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*. Reading (and clubs) was also critical to an educated identity among African Americans, see Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

³³¹ A letter to the editor of the *West Africa Times* asked for copies of the paper to be delivered. The letter was written in the vernacular, which the editor used as evidence to support his claim that all classes of Africans were reading the paper (*West Africa Times*, April 10, 1931). H. G. Mensah argued that the "rising generation," young men between 20 and 35, stopped reading books after graduating from school. These young men were reading the daily and weekly newspapers instead. H. G. Mensah, "Do you read? If so, what?" *West Africa Times*, July 30, 1931, 3.

moved one step closer to joining “refined society.”³³² In his article on reading, Mensah also noted that Baroness Emmuska Orczy’s *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905; 1907) was a favorite novel among Gold Coast readers.³³³ Other popular writers listed by Mensah were Marie Correlli, Sir Walter Scott, and Mr. Edgar Wallace.³³⁴ Newell identifies Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*, Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help*, and advice books and pamphlets in English and the vernacular as popular texts among readers. Popular titles from the period include *Advice to Young Men*, *Christian Family Life and Bringing up Children*, *Christian Courtship*, *Happy Homes*, *How to Catch a Girl*, *The Vision of a Model Village and How Culture (Civilisation) Grows*.³³⁵ Between May and July 1931, the Optimist Literary Club sponsored a series of meetings on Shakespeare’s *A Midsummers Night’s Dream*, and in November 1931, the Accra High School performed Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.³³⁶ “Marjorie Mensah” was a fan of Marie Corelli, but she could not “be claimed to be a classic.” She suggested that Gold Coast girls read more of the works of “the really classical authors” such as Charlotte and Emily Bronte, and Jane Austin, and the poetry of Jane Ingelow, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “and coming a little more

³³² H. G. Mensah, “Do you read? If so, what?” *West Africa Times*, July 30, 1931, 3.

³³³ *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was first published in London in 1905 by Greening & Co. followed by a “popular edition” in 1907. Orczy was a Hungarian woman of aristocratic origins who wrote mystery stories in English. Her early work includes a series of detective stories published in the London based Royal Magazine between 1901 and 1905. The first edition of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was succeeded by additional Pimpernel stories published after 1907 including *The Scarlet Pimpernel: A Romance* in 1907 (London: Greening & Co.) and *The League of Scarlet Pimpernel* in 1919 (London: Cassell & Co.). Sir Percy, the heroic Englishman and the ‘Scarlet Pimpernel,’ lived a double life in Paris as the rescuer of aristocrats and innocents during the Reign of Terror that followed the French Revolution. The book has been described as “very French and very genteel England” as was a huge success among readers in Europe and North America. From the 1930s the story and the hero Scarlet Pimpernel served as a template for a succession of Hollywood films and comic-book heroes (<http://www.scarletpimpernel.com/whowas.html>). The women’s Column of the *West Africa Times* also makes a cultural reference to Scarlet Pimpernel in the early 1930s.

³³⁴ H. G. Mensah, “Do you read? If so, what?” *West Africa Times*, July 30, 1931, 3. Sir Walter Scott is also referenced by freelance writer C. S. Adjei. “To the Editor of the *West Africa Times*,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 16, 1931, 618.

³³⁵ Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*, 22, 53, 69, 77, 89.

³³⁶ “The Globe Theatre in Accra,” *West Africa Times*, November 10, 1931, 2.

to the modern standards, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and Phillis Wheatley.” These women’s writing was free of the “false heroine sort of stuff,” from “Shop Girl To Duchess” found in the “Penny dreadfuls.”³³⁷ Girls would be wiser and the nation better “nourished” if they were to pay more attention to the classics for a change.

Of all the columns from this period, the *West Africa Times*’s the “Ladies’ Corner” written by men and women writers who used the penname “Marjorie Mensah” was the most literary. It included lengthy reviews of literature and poetry from all over the world, as well as original short stories, plays, and essays. It discussed European and North American writers and poets.³³⁸ The column also included discussions of writing by African American writers, activists, poets, and lyricists including Booker T. Washington,³³⁹ Phillis Wheatley,³⁴⁰ Angelina Grimke, Gwendolyn Bennett, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Anne Spencer.³⁴¹

“Marjorie Mensah” also responded to imperial constructions of African womanhood. In 1933, the “Ladies’ Corner” featured a review of Bernard Shaw’s *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* and Charles Maxwell’s parody of the essay *The White Girl in Search of God*.³⁴² The writer of the column, “Marjorie Mensah,” looked forward to a future review of a second parody of the same essay by W. R. Matthews, *The Adventures of Gabriel (the angel) in his Search for Mr. Shaw*.³⁴³ A year

³³⁷ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *Times of West Africa*, January 22, 1932, 2.

³³⁸ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *Times of West Africa*, January 22, 1932, 2. Mensah discussed Marie Corelli’s *Thelma* and *The Sorrows of Satan*; Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*; Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*; Jane Austin’s *Pride and Prejudice*; mentions by “more modern standards” she cites Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Phillis Wheatley.

³³⁹ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, July 29, 1931, 2.

³⁴⁰ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” May 11, 1931, 2.

³⁴¹ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” May 22, 1931, 2.

³⁴² “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, December 4, 1933.

³⁴³ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *Times of West Africa*, December 4, 1933, 2.

later, a third original parody of Shaw's essay was published in the Corner under the penname "Marjorie Mensah," entitled, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for Mr. Shaw* (published in the *Times of West Africa* between September 25, 1934 and October 18, 1934).

"Marjorie's" rewriting of and response to Shaw's work is a complex engagement with Shaw's ideas (and also the ideas of his contemporaries H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, and members of the Fabian Society in London) about the post-war world order that was being discussed within international and imperial circuits. In her search for Mr. Shaw, "Marjorie's" "black girl" traveled all the way to London with a tennis racket (referred to in the text as a "symbol" of modernity) in one hand to meet the "brave" man, who she declared "a great man, full of the experience of the world and ripe in knowledge." At this meeting, the fictional Shaw tells the black girl not to worry, for he is "aware of the case of the Africans races." He promises her that "[w]hen I have completed the brave new world that I am fashioning, I will not leave Africa out"; his "brave" book was merely a "modest introduction" to his future intentions for Africa.³⁴⁴

The black girl featured in the "Ladies' Corner" was "a modern black girl," still the product of "missionary school," but with "some considerable English polish"—an "updated" version of Shaw's naked and mission-educated Bantu African girl who carried a bible and knobkerry. As this last example shows, discussions in the press were not confined to local concerns, but rather local concerns intersected with the international and imperial debates taking place in London and other European metropolitan cities.

³⁴⁴ Mabel Dove, "The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Mr. Shaw," in *Selected Writings of a Pioneer West African Feminist*, ed. Stephanie Newell and Audrey Gadzekpo (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004), 39-58.

Newspaper writers' engagement with these debates was further complicated by local readers' involvement in these discussions.

Many of Accra's clubs sponsored dances and social events, providing residents with numerous opportunities to attend dances, musicals, penny operas, and cabaret shows. The most popular form of entertainment, for all members of the English-literate group, was dancing. In a single week, Accra residents could expect to find several dance events announced in the newspapers.³⁴⁵ Nightclubs, bars, restaurants, and movie houses regularly offered late night music and dancing.³⁴⁶ The more formal dance events were sponsored by one of the local clubs, including the Ladies Section of the NCBWA, the YACCAS, the Accra Youngsters, the Optimist Literary Society, the Accra Social Reformers Club, and Ladies Musical Society.³⁴⁷ Sponsored dances were held at the Rodger Club and the Palladium. Men were required to pay for an entry ticket that, depending on the dance, cost between one and five shillings (five shillings representing a high price dance that only wealthy men could afford).³⁴⁸ Women were admitted free of charge. They were, however, expected to wear European "frock" dresses instead of African "cloth" dresses. During the early thirties, floor length skirts were reported to be popular among women from the "upper set," while younger women preferred the long

³⁴⁵ It was not uncommon for as many as four dances to be announced in the papers each week, and advertisements for the cinema suggest a routine of after film dance and music.

³⁴⁶ An article on the re-opening of the Accra Central Bar (formerly known as the Gold Coast Bar on Station road) commented on the large crowd. The owner of the club also owned Charity Bar and Restaurant in Horse Road, Merry Villas. Dancing and free refreshments for ladies were offered. *Times of West Africa*, February 5-6, 1932, 1.

³⁴⁷ A dance to be hosted by the Accra Social Reformers Club on August 7, 1931. "Announcement," *West Africa Times*, July 16, 1931, 2. The Optimism Dancing Club at Nkawkaw gave a dance that included Europeans and Africans. "High Class Dancing," *West Africa Times*, April 13, 1931, 1.

³⁴⁸ At this time, British money consisted of British Pounds (£), Shillings (s), and silver pennies or "denarius" (d). 10/- denoted a bank note worth ten shilling. The one pound note appeared after WWI alongside a ten shilling note, five shilling note, and half crown note. Twelve pennies equaled one shilling. Three shillings and four pennies equaled forty pennies. One U.S. dollar equaled five shillings.

“dance frock.”³⁴⁹ The most frequently mentioned bands that performed at the dances included the Police Band, which had a regular Sunday show at the Accra Club (a European club), and the Regimental Band.³⁵⁰ Both bands played classic tunes and dance songs. Most dances featured a dance competition.³⁵¹ It was also common for dances to be preceded by a play or picture show.³⁵²

Clubs also sponsored dramatic and musical performances. In the summer of 1931, the Ladies’ Musical Society performed the Gilbert and Sullivan Opera *Trial by*

³⁴⁹ In April 1931, The YACCAS Club sponsored a dance at the Palladium. “Miss Marjorie” attended the dance and devoted two columns to its description (*West Africa Times*, April 8 and 7, 1931). She noted the women’s clothing and the décor of the Palladium. Generally, Palladium dances were seen as less exclusive than dances held at the Rodger Club. The crowds are described as larger and more mixed in terms of social class. Mensah frequently lamented the increasing number of “undesirable” women at the dances and urged her male colleagues to be more discerning in their admittance of women. She suggested that dances at the Palladium and elsewhere were in the habit of admitting any woman in a European dress, irrespective of her educational history, manners, and morals. On young women’s dress. Miss Edwards, “Brilliant Dance at the Palladium. The YACCAS Club,” *West Africa Times*, April 7, 1931, 4.

³⁵⁰ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, July 6-7, 1931. “Marjorie” attended the Accra Youngsters dance where the Regimental Band played. In his column entitled “A Dairy of a Man About Town,” “Zadig” criticized the Police Band, arguing that there should be a band in town that is for the people and not only for hire. He stated, “For all we know, the Police Band is an adjunct of the Police Force,” and yet the public gains no benefit from their presence. In all countries where Regimental Bands are found, the public enjoys free concerts by the band once a week. He stated that there were several public squares in Accra where the band could play and urged the government to support at least one free concert per week. The people, he claimed, wanted music. It was common practice for people to go to the Accra Club on Sundays to hear the Police Band. The people enjoy the Classic tunes and dance songs that the Band provided at the Club.

³⁵¹ Dance at the Merry Villas hosted by the Philharmonics on April 11, 1931. The dance was preceded by musical comedy. The Police Band supplied the music. Dance competition, Fox Trot. *West Africa Times*.

³⁵² The dance was hosted by the YACCAS Club. The acting Governor of the Gold Coast was in attendance. The dance was preceded by three plays “Mishaps of Caesar Crum,” “The Jealous Husband,” and “Black Justice.” The first play might be *The Mishaps of Caesar Crum. An Ethiopian farce, in three scenes*, which is a 14 page play published by Happy Hours Co., New York, in 1876 as the first part of a series called “Darkey Plays” (*Mishaps of Caesar Crum An Ethiopian farce, in three scenes*. 1874. New York: Happy Hours Company). It is possible that *The Jealous Husband* was a variation of Cervantes’ novella *The Jealous Husband* published in 1640 and translated into English by James Mabbe in 1654 (London: William Sheares). I could not locate a reference to a play entitled *Black Justice*. All reference information was obtained from the British Library integrated catalogue. According to Miss Edwards, the actors included many of the “A list people,” including Ribeiro and Vander Puije. Edwards described the dance competition as “the most brilliant shows witnessed in Accra,” adding that “[a]lmost everybody who counts attended the dance.” The standard of dress among ladies was described as “high,” and the long dance frock dominated. The clothing of the “bright young set” was described as “dashing.” Miss Edwards, an employee at the printing office, participated in the dance competition. The cup was won by a Miss Mary Evans. The Police Band provided music that lasted until 2 a. m. Miss Edwards, “Brilliant Dance at the Palladium. The YACCAS Club,” *West Africa Times*, April 7, 1931, 4.

Jury and the Rodger Club sponsored a cabaret that showcased sketches by Africans and Europeans.³⁵³ In November 1931, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* was performed at the Palladium by the Accra High School.³⁵⁴ In December 1931, the Bishop's School performed English composer William Walton's cantata "Belshazzar's Feast" at the school auditorium.³⁵⁵ While not directly sponsored by clubs, films formed another important aspect of the social lives of English-literate residents, especially in the 1930s as silent and sound film became more widely available in the Colony, and as the number of cinemas increased. Among the oldest cinemas in Accra was the Palladium where residents could watch films from the United States, enjoy post-film dances, and attend musical and theatrical performances.³⁵⁶ In February of 1932, the women's column of the *West Africa Times* described the Palladium as "the place for romance" among young men and women.³⁵⁷ Additional movie houses were built in the mid 1930s. The majority of cinemas in Accra, including the Palladium, were owned by the wealthy African businessman Mr. Alfred J. Ocansey who also owned the City Press (that published newspapers *Daily Echo*, *Gold Coast Spectator*, and *African Morning Post*). Films were shown at the Palladium, the Ocansey Plaza Cinema, and the Ocansey's Mikado Cinema

³⁵³ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, July 15, 1931, 2; Cabaret show at the Rodger Club, *Gold Coast Independent*, June 27, 1931, 847. Governor Slater and his wife attended. Ticket price for men was 5 shillings. Women's entrance was free.

³⁵⁴ "The Globe Theatre in Accra," *West Africa Times*, November 10, 1931, 2.

³⁵⁵ "Grand sacred dramatic cantata entitled 'Belshazzar's Feast,'" *West Africa Times*, November 10, 1931, 2. They are performing the English composer William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. The cantata was first performed at the Leeds Festival October 8, 1931. "In the story of Belshazzar's Feast, the Jews are in exile in Babylon. After a feast at which Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, commits sacrilege by using the Jews' sacred vessels to praise the heathen gods, he is miraculously killed, the kingdom falls, and the Jews regain their freedom." Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belshazzar's_Feast_\(Walton\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belshazzar's_Feast_(Walton)). Tickets for this event were available in Accra at the English Church Mission Book Store in Accra and from Mrs. C. J. Reindorf, Mrs. Louis Odamtten, Mrs. John Buckman (all elite West Africans).

³⁵⁶ Newell and Gadzekpo, *Selected Writings*, 120, note 8.

³⁵⁷ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, February 2, 1932, 2.

in Nsawam (near Accra). Film prices ranged from three pennies to three shillings.³⁵⁸ On weekends, dances followed film screenings. “Ladies” were free and “gents” were charged one shilling.³⁵⁹ The time between film releases and their showing in the cinemas of Accra varied, ranging from a few months to several years.³⁶⁰

The majority of films that played in Accra during the 1930s were imported from the United States and included *The Lost City*³⁶¹ (“African jungle” serial, U.S.A., 1920), *Son of Tarzan*³⁶² (serial in 15 episodes, U.S.A., 1921), *Laughing at Danger* (U.S.A., 1924), *Battling Brewster* (serial, date and location unknown), *Secret Service Sanders*³⁶³ (detective serial in 15 reels, U.S.A., 1925), *Fighting Youth*³⁶⁴ (U.S.A., 1925), *The Talk of Hollywood* (U.S.A., 1929), *Gold Diggers of Broadway*³⁶⁵ (U.S.A., 1929), *The Dawn Patrol* (U.S.A., 1930), *Gold Diggers of 1933*³⁶⁶ (U.S.A., 1933). Hollywood films produced at this time glorified British imperialism. As historian James Morris notes, “Many an old stalwart of Warner Brothers or MGM was to be seen in the 1930s leading his sepoy into the jaws of the Khyber, or limping blood-stained out of the African

³⁵⁸ Prices for entry to the cinema in 1931 were six pennies, one shilling, two shillings, six pennies, three shillings. Advert, “Palladium : Gold Diggers of Broadway,” *West Africa Times*, August 29, 1931, 2.

³⁵⁹ Ocansey’s Plaza Cinema, “Dance every Saturday night,” featuring the Apedwa New Brights Orchestra, ladies free, gents 1s, advert, *Gold Coast Spectator*, November 27, 1937, 1796. Palladium, “Dance after show,” featuring the City Orchestra, advert, *Gold Coast Spectator*, November 20, 1937, 1765.

³⁶⁰ *The Gold Diggers of Broadway*, for example, was released in the United States in 1929 and was advertised in the *West Africa Times* in August of 1931 and in the *Gold Coast Spectator* in October 1937. Palladium, advert, “Gold Diggers of Broadway,” *Gold Coast Spectator*, October 30, 1937, 1657.

³⁶¹ Playing at Ocansey’s Mikado Cinema in Nsawam (near Accra), “African jungle serial” starring Juanita Hansen and George Chesebro, advert, *Gold Coast Spectator*, November 13, 1937.

³⁶² In 1938, Ocansey’s Plaza Cinema was playing “Son of Tarzan.” “Son of Tarzan . . . He is king of the African jungle indeed,” advert, *Gold Coast Spectator*, January 8, 1938, 26.

³⁶³ Ocansey’s Plaza Cinema, advert, *Gold Coast Spectator*, November 27, 1937, 1796.

³⁶⁴ Palladium, advert, “William Fairbanks and Pauline Garon in ‘Fighting Youth,’” *Gold Coast Spectator*, November 20, 1937, 1765.

³⁶⁵ “Palladium : Gold Diggers of Broadway,” prices: 6d., 1s., 2s., 6d., 3s. Advert, *West Africa Times*, August 29, 1931, 2; Palladium, advert, “Gold Diggers of Broadway,” *Gold Coast Spectator*, October 30, 1937, 1657.

³⁶⁶ Ocansey’s Lyric Cinema Koforidu (near Accra) played the *Gold Diggers of 1933*.

bush.”³⁶⁷ While not all of the films from the U.S. focused on empire, ideas about race were propagated through these films through storylines that depicted white men as the brave conquerors of an “uncivilized” Africa.

Sporting clubs and events were another critical component of Accra’s West African public sphere. Accra had several sporting clubs and residents enjoyed participating in and watching Cricket, football, boxing and tennis matches. European and African tennis, billiard, cycling, and cricket clubs and teams competed annually in the inter-colonial matches against Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia. The much anticipated inter-colonial games promised numerous celebratory dances, concerts and parties.³⁶⁸ As was true of most British colonies, Accra had a horse racing track called the Accra Races and horse racing club called the Accra Turf Club. The track was managed by the Accra Turf Club, a club for horse owners and racing enthusiasts (the club was originally intended for horse owners, however only two of twelve members owned horses in 1931). The Club’s membership was diverse and included Africans, Europeans, and Syrians of all social and economic backgrounds.³⁶⁹ The races drew a mixed crowd.³⁷⁰ Describing a typical day at the races, “Marjorie Mensah” of the *West Africa Times* wrote that the track was crowded and reminded her of a fair in Wales. Children played while women and men from all social classes watched the race. The “A list people,” most notably, Governor Slater and his wife, their daughter Nancy Slater, the Ribeiros sisters,

³⁶⁷ James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 367.

³⁶⁸ School sports teams competed against each other, and there was a bike race in 1937. Report on sporting events for 1937, *Gold Coast Spectator*, January 8, 1938. A School Sports League is mentioned in *West Africa Times*, April 10, 1931.

³⁶⁹ The writer of the article noted that African and Syrian members were excluded from the Club’s steering committee that was controlled by Europeans. “Accra Turf Club” (editorial), *Gold Coast Independent*, April 25, 1931, 528.

³⁷⁰ People from all economic backgrounds attended the races in the late nineteenth century. After WWI boxing became popular. Parker, *Making the Town*, 205.

Mable Dove, and Gold Coast barrister Mr. E. C. Quist, were reported to spend their weekends socializing at the track.³⁷¹ The race course was the location of other public events including a Military Torchlight Tatroo in July 1931. She reported “every one of any ‘count’ in Accra was there,” and noted that European women were wearing very stylish Russian boots with short skirts. Many of her colleagues were also at the event.³⁷²

Accra’s vibrant urban environment was in large measure due to the wealth created from the cocoa industry during the early 1920s. The demand for cocoa led to an increase in the number of people traveling between the cocoa fields of the Ashanti region and the Accra Harbour. The surplus of wealth from this industry was used to build roads, railways and schools, which further facilitated physical and social mobility among West Africans in the Gold Coast Colony and protectorate territories. Cocoa wealth also enabled more families to send their children to local schools and in some cases abroad for higher education. It was common for these high school and university graduates to settle in Accra where there were more employment opportunities for western-educated Africans.

The 1920s was also the decade of an ambitious colonial government that was, for the first time, eager to invest in the education of the indigenous population and to develop the Colony’s infrastructure. Governor Guggisberg’s “Ten-Year Development Plan” for economic, political and social development in the Gold Coast resulted in new roads, hospitals, and schools.³⁷³ In 1923, a new hospital was opened near the Korle Lagoon,

³⁷¹ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, November 1, 1931, 2.

³⁷² “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, July 1 and 2, 1931, 2.

³⁷³ David, *A Political History of Ghana*, 55.

followed by the opening of the Prince of Wales College at Achimota in 1927, and the Accra-Kumasi Railway in 1928. These initiatives also saw the proliferation of government, private, and mission school and a sharp increase in the literacy rate. New shops opened on the high street; and, European firms established additional offices and warehouses near the coast.

By the end of the twenties, the participants in Accra's West African public sphere had grown increasingly diverse, now encompassing university graduates from the Gold Coast and other parts of the Empire, and locally-educated men.³⁷⁴ The majority of locally-educated men and women, and also Gold Coast Africans who had studied at universities abroad, originated from the southern region of the Gold Coast, and belonged to one of the Akan ethnic and linguistic groups. Absent from discussions in the press, however, were references to specific ethnic identities. Instead of referring to their ethnicity, writers of all educational backgrounds tended to identify themselves as Gold Coast and African, and used the ethnically unmarked categories of "native" and "custom" to discuss indigenous cultural norms and practices. Occasional references were made to the translation of speeches from a European language into Ga or Twi. However, when western-educated Africans entered the public sphere, they did so as Gold Coasters, Gold Coast Africans, and as Africans. This was, in part, a practical response to the diversity of Accra's educated group, but also a product of the public sphere and the types of identities that the educated elite who controlled the press were promoting within this domain.

³⁷⁴ Between the 1870s and through the 1910s, Accra's African clubland was not as dynamic or bustling as it became in the 1920s and 1930s. During this earlier period it was much smaller and more homogenous, involving mainly university-educated professionals with strong economic, political, and social ties to the colonial government, Christian missionary organizations, European merchants, and powerful African chiefs. Most African intellectuals resided at Cape Coast, just west of Accra, at this time.

The educated elite were perhaps more deliberate in their resistance to ethnic affiliations. Ethnic identifications contradicted their political movement to foster unity and co-operation among western-educated West Africans from a range of ethnic groups from the four different territories that made up British West Africa. The political organizations that the educated elite belonged to or supported, including the National Congress of British West Africa and the West African Students' Union promoted a West Africa nation and identity that encompassed all educated Africans. As the educated elite discovered in London and Accra, the privileging of ethnic categories led to internal disputes and factions and discouraged unity within the western-educated group as West Africans, and thus, stunted the development of a West African nation. However, the promotion of a unified identity in Accra was complicated by class divisions within the educated group. Unlike in London, the western-educated African residents of Accra showed dramatic variation in literacy skills and educational experiences. As will be discussed in the following sections, the educated elite, while invested in the founding of a united West Africa (that could not be achieved without the help of locally-educated readers), were also interested in defining themselves as members of an elite class and securing their control over the public sphere and a future West African nation.

Accra's Literary-minded and English-literate Residents

Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, John Mensah Sarbah, a well known Gold Coast lawyer, divided the English-literate residents of the coastal area into three social classes: the "barely" literate, the "poorly" educated petty clerks, and the highly

literate professional lawyers, doctors, educators, and businessmen.³⁷⁵ By the beginning of the 1930s, the group of educated clerks referred to by Mensah Sarbah—the graduates of local mission and government grammar schools—had emerged as a highly visible section of Accra’s western-educated group and West African public sphere. Stephanie Newell’s research provides a detailed account of this group’s development as critical participants in the formation of literary culture in colonial Ghana during the interwar period. Her research fills a significant gap in the secondary literature on western-educated Gold Coast Africans during the colonial period that has focused almost exclusively on Mensah Sarbah’s last category, the highly literate professionals. As Newell demonstrates, highly literate professionals were not the only participants in the construction of literary culture; they were joined (and often challenged) by locally-educated grammar graduates. Drawing from Newell’s research, I investigate the interaction between the highly literate and the locally-educated groups in Accra’s clubs and newspapers. Members of the reading, writing, and club-going public of all backgrounds participated in the creation of class difference in the press, though the highly literate group was particularly aggressive in their construction of class difference.

The actual histories and economic and occupational backgrounds of Accra’s readers, writers, and clubgoers of the 1930s were exceedingly diverse. Members of this group did not fall neatly into distinct categories, let alone two; however, the highly literate and university-educated newspaper owners and writers sought to divide the English-literate group into two primary categories: men and women who studied at

³⁷⁵ Philip J. Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 99. From John Mensah Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws. A Brief Introduction to the Principles of the Native laws and Customs of the Fanti and Akan Districts of the Gold Coast* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1904), 246.

schools and universities abroad and those who studied at mission and government schools in the region. The university/"foreign" educated were presented as superior to the locally-educated and were described as leaders of educated society.³⁷⁶ Several additional terms that coincided with these two categories circulated in the papers. The locally-educated group was referred to as "Gold Coast scholars," "other classes," "home girls," "local classes," "literate masses," "pseudo-intellectuals," and the "barely literate." The university graduates who controlled the press referred to their group as "local professionals," "literati," "upper-set," "Accra Society," "upper-tenth," and the less flattering categories, "been-tos" (as in "been to England"), "foreign educated," and "Europeanized Africans."³⁷⁷

Accra's Grammar School Graduates

The grammar school graduates of Accra encompassed a range of people, including primary and secondary school graduates, certified teachers, and self-taught English-literate Africans. The increase in the size of this group during the 1920s and

³⁷⁶ K. A. B. Jones-Quartey defines traditional African society as including many different people: "the chief, the professional, the clerk, and the fisherman," who, he claims, were all physically close by "clan-family system" or "kinship complex." When discussing Azikiwe's reception in Accra in the 1930s, he refers to "Accra's society," the men and women who attended his lectures and attempted to befriend him, but because they did not have family ties, and were somewhat in awe of him, tended to see him as "both a 'stranger' and also something rather special." These members of Accra society "flocked around him smiling broadly and shaking hands after his lectures," but owing to an absence of "blood ties" and "common community of origin" it would take Azikiwe time and effort to establish rapport. In describing local reaction to Azikiwe's marriage in 1936, Jones-Quartey speaks of two sections—"Gold Coast community" and "Accra Society." *A Life of Azikiwe* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 118, 130-1.

³⁷⁷ This dissertation uses the term grammar school graduates to refer to the men and women who studied locally at private, mission and government schools in the West Africa and the terms local professional, university graduates, and British educated Africans interchangeably to refer to the group of men and women who completed degrees in higher education at universities abroad.

1930s was the result of post-WWI government policies in education that expanded the number of schools in the colony, and of African initiatives to extend education through the founding of literary clubs and schools, reading, and obtaining university degrees by mail. Under the direction of Governor Guggisberg in the twenties, new private, mission, and government schools were opened and the number of students enrolled in these schools experienced a sharp increase from previous decades. Developments in education were meant to coincide with an increase in the number of low-level appointments for mission and government educated men. The number of appointments saw some growth in the 1920s, followed by very little growth in the 1930s.³⁷⁸ During the 1930s, locally-educated men worked as teachers, shop keepers, accountants, clerks, tailors, police officers, and priests. The few women who formed part of this group worked as telephone exchange operators, midwives, and office clerks. The majority of women, however, did not study beyond standard III (three years of grammar school education) and worked as petty traders and seamstresses.³⁷⁹ Gender inequality in education might explain the near

³⁷⁸ Between 1919 and 1926, Governor Guggisberg, responding to pressure from educated Africans admitted twenty-seven Africans to European appointments (compare this number with the figure from 1919 that revealed a total of one African in a European appointment). Few of these appointments were senior positions. Efforts to Africanize the civil service lost momentum in the 1930s. In 1938 there were still only thirty-one Africans in senior appointments and in 1948 there were only ninety-eight out of 1,300 appointments. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 105-109, 123.

³⁷⁹ A teaching training program for girls opened in the 1930s. Female journalists were less common. Women wrote for papers, but usually as letter writers or as freelance writers. The only staff journalist that I know of from the 1930s was Mabel Dove, though Dove claimed in 1931 that at least four other women in the Gold Coast had taken up writing. It is unknown who these women were and in exactly in what capacity they contributed to the press. I have been unable to locate information about midwifery training. Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, which opened in 1923, might have trained women as midwives. The midwife category comes from K. A. Busia's *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi*. The survey data was collected during the 1940s and might reflect later developments in the field. I have also been unable to locate information on nursing as an occupation for women at this time. I suspect that women's training in nursing did not begin until the 1940s. Other evidence from the press on women's employment includes the following: A letter to the editor of the *Gold Coast Independent* indicated that in 1931 Miss Florie Jane Codjoe worked at the Exchange Office at the General Post Office in Accra. Letter, *Gold Coast Independent*, December 19, 1931, 1623. Miss Dora Nancy Adjepong was employed at the Telephone Exchange until her wedding. May 23, 1931, *Gold Coast Independent*, 655. In 1932, the *Times of West*

absence of locally-educated women from press debates as letter writers or club participants.

Locally-educated Accrans' cohesiveness as a group or class is questionable, though scholars have attempted to define them as a distinct group that emerged during the late colonial period. Philip Foster, and more recently Stephan Miescher, define this group as "salaried workers" and "clerks" who included school teachers, clerks, low-level civil servants who during the late 1920s and 1930s became "'creatures of colonial urbanization' with unfixed lifestyles and allegiances but 'were anxious for self-improvement.'"³⁸⁰ Miescher focuses on concepts of gender and sexuality among locally-educated Kwawu men, many of whom spent some time in Accra and formed part of the locally-educated group (during the late 1930s and 1940s). The men in Miescher's study self-identified as members the *akrakyefoo* (clerk in Twi).³⁸¹ Stephanie Newell focuses more broadly on the grammar school graduates of the coastal cities who she argues played a significant role in the development of literary culture in colonial Ghana. She emphasizes this group's educational and class aspirations, and refers to them as grammar school graduates (as well as "newly educated" and "non-elite readers"). My description of the grammar school graduates of Accra borrows most extensively from Newell's description and analysis of this group.

Africa published an advertisement that offered "good pay" to three experienced girls who were well educated, well spoken, and conversant with Accra. *Times of West Africa*, March 9 1932, 3. K. A. Busia, *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies on behalf of the Govt. of the Gold Coast, 1950), 40.

³⁸⁰ Kofi Ermeleh Agovi, *The African writer and the phenomenon of the nation state in Africa* (Pretoria, Republic of South Africa: Unit for Development Analysis, 1990), 10.

³⁸¹ Stephan Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 84-114.

By the late 1920s, grammar school graduates, mainly men, had “set up literary and social clubs for the discussion of literature and culture, wrote reports on club activities for African-owned newspapers, and, by the late 1930s, produced essays and occasional novellas for publication by local and international press.”³⁸² These men traveled to Accra from surrounding villages; each equipped with different skills and levels of proficiency in English. Some studied for a couple of years at local primary schools while others studied for several years at primary and secondary schools. The number of years spent in school was not always consistent and students frequently dropped in and out of school as their financial circumstances changed. This was especially true for women, who usually spent less time than men at school, studying between one and three years on average. It was also common practice for men to engage in self study through reading and participating in literary club activities. University-educated men organized informal educational meetings where they helped grammar school graduates complete prepare for entrance examinations for universities in the U.K. (some university graduates founded local high schools, such as the Accra High School that opened in the early 1930s).

A small number of men continued their education by attending local secondary schools or teaching colleges. Secondary schools were expensive and employment after graduation was not guaranteed; teacher training colleges that offered employment after graduation were preferred. In the 1920s, the main teacher training college was the Presbyterian Training College at Akropong, a town north of Accra.³⁸³ Women were less

³⁸² Newell, “Entering the Territory of Elites,” 211.

³⁸³ Miescher states that most clerks had completed Standard VII. The secondary literature is contradictory. Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 77-82.

likely to have studied beyond primary education and many left school after completing the third grade. The number of women attending secondary schools and teaching training courses did increase at the end of the decade. For men who did not obtain teaching certificates, clerical employment at a European firm or government office was reported to be the most desirable outcome.

According to a report from the Basel Mission on education in the Gold Coast, educated men rejected technical training and shunned manual labor. The report proclaimed that among the “upper standard boys” there is “a distaste for anything savouring of labour.” The Basel Mission argued these men had stubbornly limited themselves to office work. Describing what they believed to be the world view of “school boys,” the report stated, “[boys attending secondary school] think that to be a scholar is to be a gentleman, and to be a gentleman precludes the possibility of gaining a livelihood except by the pen. Therefore it is and will be always an exception to the rule when a boy who has passed Standard V makes up his mind to learn a handicraft, as smith or carpenter.”³⁸⁴ As this quotation suggests, the majority of locally-educated men aspired to office work, however, by the early 1930s, the economic situation in the Colony failed to support the employment goals of grammar school graduates.

The depression reached the Gold Coast by way of a significant drop in the value of cocoa on the world market in October of 1930. European firms struggled to pay their employees and in some cases had to reduce their staff.³⁸⁵ Many graduates turned to

³⁸⁴ W.J. Rottmann, *The Educational Work of the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast*, Appendix A. I *special reports on educational subjects* (London: HMSO, 1905), xiii, part ii, 300. Quoted in Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana*, 61.

³⁸⁵ The Cocoa Federation would withhold cocoa from the market until February 1931 in order to create a demand and higher prices. European agents, however, were reported to have continued to reap the benefits of their salaries, bungalows, and paid leave time in England. Some Africans were hopeful that the

government service for employment. Unlike the private firms, government service offered a steady and consistent income and pension. While government service was a more promising option for Secondary School graduates, available positions were rare and competition for them was fierce. At the same time, a number of students were returning from England where they had obtained degrees in higher education. While the two groups did not always compete for exactly the same positions, the university graduates would most likely have been the more successful applicants within the job market for English-literate Africans.

According to the newspapers, the surplus of mission and government educated job seekers in Accra caused salaries to decrease across the board. Newspaper writers produced lengthy editorials attempting to persuade grammar school graduates to abandon their dream of clerical work and seek “practical” employment as tailors, farmers, carpenters, and blacksmiths. Agriculture was deemed among the more promising fields of employment for newly educated men. Writers recommended a “return to the earth,” encouraging newly educated men to use their education to cultivate the land.³⁸⁶ Against

depression would encourage European firms to replace expensive European agents with more cost effective African agents. There have already been a few successful African agents, Mr. R.M. Korsah (deceased) and the Taylor brothers. “An Opportunity . . . Will They Take it? A Call to Africans” by Integritas, *West Africa Times*, April 20, 1931, 3.

³⁸⁶ Some staff writers viewed the depression as an opportunity for Africans to reduce their dependency on European employers and to use their educations to begin to “intelligently” cultivate the land. *Gold Coast Independent*, July 4, 1931, 854; “An Opportunity . . . Will They Take it? A Call to Africans” by Integritas, *West Africa Times*, April 20, 1931, 3. One writer argued that young men’s drive to work in an office was slowing the economic and political development of the country. He urged young men to seek other occupations, and was especially encouraging of agricultural work. Similar to the Basel Mission report of 1905, he reported that African youth “disdained” manual labor. However, unlike the Mission, he infused his critique with an analysis of race oppression. He wrote, “[I]et me tell the educated youth of Africa that the white man has no appreciation of him and his fine cut suit, gold chain, watch and walking stick, because he is dependent on him (white man) for his living; and he can be made to put on rags in the twinkling of an eye.” Africans needed to stop relying on European firms for employment. The white man, he argued, did not care for the advancement of the country. The educated youth must advance their cause by developing the land. He stated, “It is the plough that will enrich our country. Come therefore with you B.A., M.A. etc for the development of the resources of our country and to work out our social evolution for

this advice, the grammar school graduates continued to strive for clerical positions, using the West African public sphere to extend their education and achieve their class aspirations.

Owing to a shared educational experience that was European and Christian, grammar school graduates held common beliefs about gender, work, success, and relationships and marriage. The more years of educational training, the more likely a grammar school graduate's lifestyle was to conform to the social expectations and norms for literate Africans set by the local professional class. Men and women who received educational training beyond the fifth standard engaged in many of the same leisure activities as the professional class, though on a smaller budget and more modest scale. When they could afford it, men wore European clothing and collected books. They used school libraries, read the local newspapers, joined and formed clubs, and attended dances, nightclubs and literary club functions.

Club participation was seen as a form of self-improvement and evidence of African self-help. Socially ambitious men used clubs to further their education and to network with other members of the English-literate group.³⁸⁷ Books and newspapers were also critical to their identity. Yiadom, a grammar school graduate and self-identified member of the "clerk class," had a "shrine to literacy" in his home that

the uplift of our race." He encouraged educated Africans to practice self help, to exploit the soil, to make use of their country to develop it for themselves. "A Message to the Educated Youth of British West Africa," by Yaw-Kuma, Fellow Youths of British West Africa, *Gold Coast Independent*, December 19, 1931, 1623.

³⁸⁷ Clubgoers were invested in self-improvement and the pursuit of improvement through knowledge. In his Presidential Address to the Reformers Club, Mr. Kwashi-Unicon, urged young men to continue their education beyond secondary school by joining and participating in club life. He viewed clubs as critical spaces of self-improvement and education. Presidential Address Delivered by Mr. M.B. Kwashie-Unicon to the Reformers Club (Christiansborg) on the 7th of April 1931. *The Gold Coast Independent*, May 2, 1931, 564.

consisted of a glass cabinet full of self help books, novels, and pamphlets. Yiadom was also a fan of local newspapers and had saved articles from the 1940s and 1950s.³⁸⁸

Yiadom aspired to marry an educated woman, as this was a critically important sign of success among literate men. Most men, however, married women from their home villages with little or no education in English shortly after graduating from school. Some of these men divorced their first wives after acquiring enough money to marry a western-educated woman under the Colonial Marriage Ordinance.

Female graduates, especially those who were educated beyond Standard III, were rare. They were highly sought after as marriage partners by a much larger group of locally-educated men. They followed similar norms and practices as locally-educated men, wearing European clothing, attending dances, and participating in literary and women's clubs. Expectations encountered during their school years shaped their adult lives. As school girls they occupied a privileged position in their households and in society. They were often excused from certain domestic chores, referred to as "Lady," owned several changes of European dresses, attended the cinema, studied with friends, and enjoyed greater freedom than the uneducated girl.

The political life of the grammar school graduates, especially Standard V-VII graduates, intersected with the political worlds of university-educated Africans and the Provincial Chiefs.³⁸⁹ As was true of the political world of the professional class, this was

³⁸⁸ People associated with the "clerk class" by Miescher participated in the press by reading, and also by submitting articles and letters to the editor. Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 29.

³⁸⁹ On all sides, formal and informal politics in the Gold Coast was male dominated. Literate women participated in politics by contributing letters to the press, offering lectures, and forming clubs. This kind of political engagement was more common among women who had received Secondary education and above. Less educated women (women with a Standard III education) might have joined unions or clubs, however very little information is available of this particular group of literate women. The market women were probably the most politically active, staging several protests during the colonial period. Salaga Market

a male dominated world revolving around clubs and newspapers. Men joined existing literary and social clubs or formed their own. Old boys' associations (school alumni networks) were common among this group. Unlike the university-educated professionals, locally-educated men established workers' unions (railway and teachers unions), and a fewer number of them joined or led *asafo* companies. The *asafo* companies were an older form of political claim making and had direct links to the country's chiefs and elders. Similar to the way that worker's unions lobby employers for their needs, *asafo* companies offered "junior" men a way to challenge the authority of chiefs and elders in the Gold Coast.³⁹⁰ During the 1930s, the "*asafo* companies together with the new 'scholars' unions'" became "the organizational vehicles through which rising grievances . . . were mobilized."³⁹¹ At this time, locally-educated men increasingly turned to *asafo* companies at this time that offered these men another powerful method of identity formation and political claim making.

women protested when Governor Guggisberg closed the market in 1923 and opened a new market, the Selwyn Market. The women were opposed to the closing of their old market and refused to set up their stalls at the new market. Women from the "hawking class," defined by Parker as people who sell goods on the street, protested when the colonial government attempted to tax them in the 1920s. Parker, *Making the Town*, 222-3.

³⁹⁰ Roger Gocking suggests the *asafo* enabled western-educated young men to gain power and authority not available to them within the African chieftaincy during the early twentieth century. He states, "by joining such fraternal organizations, [young men] they had freed themselves from allegiance to their chiefs, and more specifically, from attendance at their courts. As the Secretary of Native Affairs recognized, it was a way of 'counteract[ing] oppression and misgovernment on the part of the Head Chiefs,' and at the same time, undermined the government's policy of indirect rule, particularly in the hinterland, where there were few officials to support the chiefs (Stone, 1974, 81)." It is unclear if by western-educated men he is referring to locally-educated men. Roger Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast: Competition for Office and the Invention of Tradition," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 28, 3 (1994): 429-30.

³⁹¹ Parker, *Making the Town*, 210.

Accra's University-educated African Professionals

While the locally-educated primary and secondary school graduates made up the majority of Accra's English-literate group in the 1930s, a smaller group of men and women who traveled abroad for reasons of education and employment controlled the press and held high positions within the informal political institutions of Accra, school boards, town councils, social and literary clubs, and the formal political institutions of the Legislative Council. These men and women were the result of decades of wealthy African families sending their children to be educated in England.³⁹² The majority came from wealthy coastal families whose connection to Europe and Christianity spanned several decades; however, during the 1910s, this group increased and diversified more than in previous decades as travel opportunities to work or study in the U. K. or other parts of the Empire, and the United States increased.

University-educated Africans included men and women from all over British West Africa. Members of this group worked as lawyers, doctors, educators, government administrators, and business owners. They earned incomes well above the average salary of most Africans at this time.³⁹³ University graduates from all fields of study contributed to the press as managers and as writers, and participated in local politics as members of

³⁹² This early generation of men mostly specialized in law. Litigation cases over land disputes and property rights were common in the Gold Coast and kept many of these men in business after they returned to the Coast.

³⁹³ The majority of university graduates of the 1920s studied law and worked as lawyers; in 1920, there were twenty-eight African barristers in Accra. For purposes of comparison the two other large coastal towns in Gold Coast, Cape Coast and Sekondi, had less than ten African lawyers in 1920. Parker, *Making the Town*, 202. During the 1930s, Agricultural science degrees were discussed in *Wasu* and also in the Gold Coast press as particularly useful for the future of the region, insofar as students and writers saw the cultivation of African land and the development of African food products to sell on the world market as critical to the economic development of their home countries as eventually self-sufficient and self-governing nations within the Empire. The majority of men who studied abroad during the interwar years, however, continued to favor law and other professional degrees.

the Legislative Council, school boards, and clubs. Highly-educated women worked as headmistresses and teachers at the local girls' schools, as office clerks, and as journalists; however, it was common practice for western-educated women to discontinue their working lives after marriage (they usually married men from their social class). As married women, they participated in literary, political, and religious clubs. The writers for the *West Africa Times* defined themselves as "local professionals," and in the thirties they also laid claim to the title "society," in some cases identifying as Accra's "upper ten" percent. Their "having been-to England" distinguished them from the locally-educated grammar school graduates who had not been to England and did not have university degrees. Education and travel abroad became a defining feature of class difference within the English-literate group.

Newspaper owners and writers used the press to define themselves as leaders of Accra's western-educated group. These men and women formed part of Accra's professional class. Men from this class participated in local politics by forming town councils and campaigning for seats on the Colony's Legislative Council. Men and women wore European style clothing, three-piece business suits and dresses. Members of this group hosted dances and benefits, belonged to special interest clubs, organized charities and dance competitions, attended theatre performances, cabaret shows, and events hosted by the Ladies' Musical Society and the Police Band. They discussed literature, politics, and inter-colonial sport matches in their newspapers and at exclusive clubs. They spent their leisure time at the Accra Races and attending "society" parties and elaborate and expensive European-styled Christian weddings. They mingled with the Governor and his family, European expatriates, and Chiefs of the Provincial Councils.

Men from this class belonged to the Rodger Club, an exclusive African club where social events and meetings took place on a regular basis. The club had an annual membership fee that was more than most Africans outside of the professional group could afford to pay. J. B. Danquah, like many of the men of his generation and class, was a local barrister and member of the Rodger Club. He was the half-brother of well-known Chief Nana Ofori Attah who later became the first Paramount Chief of the home state Akyem Abuakwa.³⁹⁴ Danquah's education was funded by donations made by residents of his home state.³⁹⁵ While pursuing his education in London, Danquah was an active member of the West African Students' Union. He served as the Union's first President and editor for the Union's magazine *Wasu*. In 1927, he returned to Accra where he worked as a lawyer and helped to establish one of the first African-owned daily newspapers, *West Africa Times*. Men associated with Accra's professional class, like Danquah, usually studied abroad, and most had professional degrees. They founded and wrote for newspapers, and participated in literary and social clubs. A few of these men held seats on the Legislative Council and were members of the Accra Town Council.³⁹⁶

Not everyone involved in the newspaper industry was from wealthy coastal or Akan royal families. During the thirties, the industry included intellectuals and writers from other British colonies in West Africa, as well as from other parts of the British Empire. West Indian-born poet and journalist Kenneth MacNeill Stewart worked as an editor and writer for the *West Africa Times* and the *Gold Coast Independent* throughout

³⁹⁴ Danquah and Nana Ofori Atta were members of the Gold Coast deputation that traveled to London in May 1934. The deputation was well-publicized in West Africa and Britain.

³⁹⁵ "Gold Coast News Week by Week," *The Gold Coast Independent*, October 24, 1931, 1362.

³⁹⁶ J. Glover-Addo, Esq. served as the Municipal Member for Accra and was also the President of the Board of the Accra High School. "Gold Coast News Week by Week," *The Gold Coast Independent*, October 24, 1931, 1362.

the decade, and Nigerian-born Nnamdi Azikiwe moved to Accra in 1934 to help start the *African Morning Post* after completing his education at the University of Pennsylvania.³⁹⁷ While in the United States, Azikiwe was influenced by his studies in economics, particularly European economic theory of the mid-20s, but also the writings and politics of Dr. Aggrey and Marcus Garvey that Jones-Quartey suggests were foundational to his studies in the U.S. While he was not a typical member of Accra society, as J. B. Danquah might be viewed, he did belong to the Rodger Club, where he was known to play tennis. He also had his marriage ceremony at the Methodist Church in James Town, Accra, suggesting that, at least during his time in Accra, he had adopted several habits of other highly literate professionals in the city.³⁹⁸ Not unlike the experiences of many other West African student travelers at this time, Azikiwe encountered and engaged a wide-range of intellectual and political theories as a student in the U.S. Jones-Quartey suggests that during his final years in the U.S., Azikiwe was in “the grip of economic theorists: the Utopian-Marxists, the Guild-Socialists, and the Fabians,” and beginning to cultivate an “intense, concentrated interest in the ideas of Passfield, Snowden, Bernard Shaw, and Ramsay MacDonald, comparing them meticulously with those of Marx and the various Utopians.”³⁹⁹ Azikiwe brought all of these ideas with him to Accra and in his work for the *African Morning Post*, where he actively promoted a “New Africa” led by African “Youth.”

³⁹⁷ Azikiwe lived and studied in the U.S. between 1925 and 1933. K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, “The Moulding of Azikiwe,” *Transition* 15 (1964): 50.

³⁹⁸ After many years of being single, Azikiwe married a western-educated Nigerian woman, Miss Flora Ogoegbunam, from his home in Onitsha. The arrangements were made by the couple’s families. The couple was married on April 4, 1931. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 129-31.

³⁹⁹ Azikiwe lived and studied in the U.S. between 1925 and 1933. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 30.

Another West African intellectual and writer who traveled to Accra during the 1930s, after having spent several years traveling, was I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson who was originally from Sierra Leone. He was born in Wilberforce, Sierra Leone to a poor Creole family. Unlike Azikiwe and many of the other men working for Accra papers during the 1930s, Wallace-Johnson's formal education was brief, consisting of two years at the Methodist Collegiate School. In order to help support his family he withdrew from the Methodist School, finding employment first as a clerk at the Customs Department in Freetown, and during World War I as a clerk for the Carrier Corps. In 1930, he helped to the Nigerian Workers' Union in Lagos. During the summer of 1930, he attended the International Trade Union Conference of Negro Workers in Hamburg, Germany and served as a member of the editorial board of the Conference's magazine, the *Negro Worker*. He continued to develop his interest in communism as a student at the People's University in Moscow. In 1933, he returned to West Africa, first to Nigeria, and after his deportation from the country, Accra. In Accra, he worked as a writer for the local newspapers, including Azikiwe's *African Morning Post*, and involved himself in a range of political activities, including the founding of the West African Youth League in the summer of 1935. The West African Youth League advocated a "united West Africa" that, different from WASU, would include not only the British colonies, but also the French colonies in West Africa. His article, "Has the African a God," which appeared in Azikiwe's newspaper the *African Morning Post* on May 15, 1936, led to his deportation. Both men, Wallace-Johnson and Azikiwe, were charged with sedition and deported from the Gold Coast. Wallace-Johnson eventually settled in London where he helped form the

International African Service Bureau in the 1930s alongside West Indian intellectuals T. Ras Makonnen, George Padmore, and C. L. R. James.⁴⁰⁰

The histories and circumstances that led both men to Accra illustrate the ways that West African students and travelers, like Wallace-Johnson and Azikiwe, encountered a rich array of resources in their travels for thinking about politics, economics, social problems, and culture. Wallace-Johnson's vision for a united independent Anglophone and Francophone West Africa could be read as a "cosmopolitan" vision of the future of Africa, and was certainly an interesting alternative to the united West Africa associated with WASU. In all cases, West Africans writers (and readers) associated with the 1930s Accra newspapers were thinking beyond a single point of reference. As they showed through the breadth of news and information reported in their press, as well as news articles on literature, social problems, and club life, these men and women were up to date on world news and affairs, and were reading the latest in economic and political philosophy, as well as history and literature from around the world. Each came to the public sphere with a rich and unique set of experiences, and each brought their own world learning to local newspaper and club discussions.

Women involved in Accra's press and literary spaces tended to be a more homogenous group, and included mainly women from wealthy coastal families. These women were absolutely critical to the image of a new age being formed among the highly literate men in the press and clubs. Their presence in the public sphere helped to reinforce the cultural authority of highly literate men, further distinguishing them from locally-educated men who did not associate with the highly-educated women of Accra.

⁴⁰⁰ Roger Gocking, *The History of Ghana* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005), 66.

Scholarships for women to study in England were rare, and the majority of women who studied abroad during the interwar period were supported by their families or husbands.⁴⁰¹

Mabel Dove, a university graduate from this generation and newspaper writer, completed her secondary education in Freetown, Sierra Leone, before attending finishing school in England. Dove's father was a lawyer and her mother was from a wealthy and established Accra family. In England, Dove studied singing, dancing, and piano-playing at the Anglican Convent in Bury St. Edmunds, and at St. Michael's College near Brighton. Unusual for a woman of her class background, though perhaps in keeping with the ideals of her generation, Dove completed a secretarial course while living in England.⁴⁰² This bold move signifies Dove's identification with an emergent image of modern womanhood—the "New Woman" of the 1920s and models of modern womanhood of the 1930s. These images arrived in the Gold Coast via American films, English literature, and news of women from India and Turkey.⁴⁰³ The secretarial skills she acquired abroad undoubtedly enhanced her performance as a staff writer of the *West Africa Times*. During the 1930s, Dove edited two of the paper's columns, "Castle & Society," and the "Ladies' Corner." Her contribution to the "Ladies' Corner" enabled her to create an image of the New Woman as African. Dove's secretarial certificate and her work for the newspaper were slightly out of character for women of her class background

⁴⁰¹ Many wealthy families sent their daughters to England in order to ensure their marriage to a "local professional." Most women who studied in England did marry a local professional regardless of compatibility. These marriages were usually arranged by families and were deemed "marriages of convenience." "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

⁴⁰² Stephanie Newell and Audrey Gadzekpo, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings of a Pioneer West African Feminist*, ed. Stephanie Newell and Audrey Gadzekpo (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004).

⁴⁰³ "Marjorie" suggested that women of her class pay closer attention to the female leaders of Turkey and India, claiming that they were working for national progress and not wasting their intellect on marriage and social functions. "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

and illustrate the changing situation among educated women. During the thirties more women from wealthy African families were beginning to earn degrees in higher education and hold professional jobs.⁴⁰⁴ They worked as teachers, headmasters at girls' schools, and as government administrators. Dorothy Lamiley Vanderpuye, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Vanderpuye of Adabraka, was educated at the Wesleyan Girls High School in Accra, followed by another five years of education at schools in Freetown and England. Upon her return to Accra, she worked as a teacher at the Royal School.⁴⁰⁵ Miss Thyra Ellen Jones-Quartey was a shorthand typist for the Education Department and Phyllis Frances Heroína Ribeiro was a second Division Teacher in 1931.⁴⁰⁶ Miss Phyllis Ribeiro worked at the Government Girls School in Accra.⁴⁰⁷

Western-educated woman's social lives, however, continued to revolve around the men in their lives—if married, their husbands, if single their father and friends. While “Marjorie Mensah” argued that most educated women wasted their time at home entertaining, or “flashing around, butterfly-like, at the different social functions about town,” a small group of women did involve themselves in local club activities, educational programs, and charity work.⁴⁰⁸ They engaged in public life by giving

⁴⁰⁴ Little information on the type of degrees that Gold Coast women obtained in the 1920s or 1930s is currently available.

⁴⁰⁵ “Brilliant Society Wedding Union of Two Great Families,” *West Africa Times*, May 7, 1931, 1. Vanderpuye's educational and occupational history is detailed in this report on her wedding to Mr. William Edujae Wood on May 5, 1931.

⁴⁰⁶ Miss Ribeiro was a member of the Violin Trio. She left her post to marry Dr. Savage of Lagos, Nigeria. *West Africa Times*, April 11, 1931, 1.

⁴⁰⁷ “Wedding of a Popular Girl,” *Times of West Africa*, April 19, 1933, 1. The article discussed the wedding of Phyllis Ribeiro and Dr. Savage. The paper reported, “A few Girl Guides were in attendance, Miss Ribeiro having devoted much of her time to their training when she was in the Government Girls School.”

⁴⁰⁸ Mensah urged women of her class to engage in public life “lest she lose the gloss of English culture,” and no longer different from the educated girls who never left the coast. She wanted to see women use their experiences abroad for national work and for improving women's education. “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies' Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

lectures at local clubs, sponsoring dances and charities, and advocating girls' education.⁴⁰⁹ In 1931, Miss Regina Quartey-Papafio presented a paper to the club on the issue of child welfare.⁴¹⁰ During the same year Mrs. Quashie-Idun gave a lecture on domestic science.⁴¹¹ In June 1931, Miss Lucy Hughes, a school teacher, lectured on the importance of punctuality for Africans at the Young People's Literary Club.⁴¹² The following year, Miss Ruby Quartey Papafio, the headmistress of the Accra Government Girls School, gave a lecture on sacrifice and Miss Lerina Bright of Achimota College held the Chair.⁴¹³ In 1933, Charlotte Quarshie-Idun lectured on domestic training to the Young People's Literary Club.⁴¹⁴ In 1934, Mercy Quartey Papafio lectured on women's place in the home and in the social life of the town, and in 1935, Charity Zormelo lectured on "Education for a new day" to the Nationalist Literary Society.⁴¹⁵ A number of women also attended and participated in the male-led Gold Coast Youth Conferences of the 1930s. Ruby Quartey Papafio gave a paper at the 1930 meeting, and Mrs. Gadys May Casely Hayford, Miss Charity Zomelo, Miss Mercy Quartey Papafio (all three were headmistresses of girls' schools) addressed the audience in 1938.⁴¹⁶

⁴⁰⁹ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

⁴¹⁰ *West Africa Times*, November 24, 1931.

⁴¹¹ Mrs. Quarshie-Idun gave lecture at the Young People's Literary Club Rooms at James Town on April 11, 1931. The lecture was on domestic training as a necessity for the African girl. The Q and A was lively and "the marriage question was delicately touched in relation to a woman's capabilities when trained with sufficient knowledge in domestic science in all of its branches." Other speakers included Mr. Ward, Mr. Hood, Rev. Blumer, Miss Papafio, Mr. Peters, and Mr. Quarshie-Idun. Mrs. Whittaker was the Chair. Noteworthy guests included Mr Ateko, Miss Cook, Mrs. Solomon-Odamtten, Mr. Whittaker, and Miss Florence Christian. *West Africa Times*, April 19, 1931, 1. The talk was also mentioned in "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 11, 1931, 2.

⁴¹² Her lecture was announced in the *West Africa Times*, June 6, 1931. Hughes argued that "we" Africans follow Europeans in every way except in punctuality.

⁴¹³ *Times of West Africa*, March 4, 1932.

⁴¹⁴ *Gold Coast Independent*, April 29, 1933.

⁴¹⁵ *Gold Coast Times*, October 13 1934 and *Gold Coast Independent*, May 4 1935.

⁴¹⁶ Hagan, "The Literary and Social Clubs of the Past," 82.

As these many public performances by women and their advertisement in the papers suggest, western-educated women played a critical double role in the public sphere: they actively contributed to public discussions (and constructions of) “social issues” and “social life” in the public domain by offering lectures on women’s education and women’s role in the making of a “new day” in Africa; and they served a symbolic function, as representations of a modern African womanhood, and, in turn, Africa for European, world and local audiences. By their association with highly-educated men (usually through marriage, but also through family ties), they helped to denote these men’s modernity, and also their capacity and power to lead the political project that would guide Africa into a new age. Women’s performances in the public were for European and world audiences as much as for local audiences of readers, writers, and clubgoers. Women’s activities in the public sphere testified to elite men’s difference from locally-educated men, and helped to further establish their class authority over this group. Women’s performances also gendered this public sphere taking up and, therefore, defining “women’s issues,” leaving highly-educated men free to articulate “men’s issues.”

Additional clubs for western-educated women included the Lady Slater’s Club for women teachers, Accra Dramatic Society, Ladies Musical Society, and Ladies Section of the National Congress for British West Africa.⁴¹⁷ The Musical Society and Ladies

⁴¹⁷ Additional illustrations of elite women’s activities include a camping trip organized by Lady Slater (the Governor’s wife) and the local Girl Guides in the spring of 1932. African women and girls, including Miss Edith Roberts, Miss Papafio, her sisters Ruby and Grace, and Phyllis and Irene Ribeiro, joined Lady Slater for a weekend camping trip. *Times of West Africa*, March 14-15, 1932, 1. It is likely that some of the participants were also members of the Lady Slater Club for African women teachers. The Lady Slater Club for lady teachers held their meetings at the Rodger Club. The purpose of the Club was to provide an

Section of the NCBWA frequently hosted dances, concerts, and benefits that were held at the Palladium and Rodger Club. Women, including Mabel Dove and Ruby Quartey Papafio wrote articles for the paper, and other women submitted letters. Through these types of social activities, and through their discussions of girls' education, domestic science, child rearing, manners, and gender relations in the public sphere, western-educated women positioned themselves as defenders of morality and society.⁴¹⁸

Viewed only in relation to the locally-educated grammar school graduates, university-educated Africans appear as the trendsetters and leaders of their community; however, this group was far from occupying a stable social and political role at this time. By the mid-1920s, they faced significant obstacles to their political ambitions and their identity as British Africans. Western-educated African men had long served as translators between the indigenous population and European merchants. During the first decades of colonial rule, the British relied heavily on these men, many of whom had law degrees from British universities, to facilitate their relationships with African chiefs, and to establish customary law and tradition in the Gold Coast. At this time, the British

opportunity for African teachers to mingle with European ladies and receive lectures from them from time to time. "The Space of Women," *West Africa Times*, May 22, 1931, 2. The Accra Dramatic Society was another popular club. One of its events featured Miss Grace Papafio reading from *Antigone*. Announcement for the Accra Dramatic Society, *West Africa Times*, March 30, 1931, 1.

⁴¹⁸ An example of "Marjorie's" republican womanhood: "Marjorie" wrote that in all civilized countries society regulates morality and determines moral standards. Women are the protectors of society's moral standards. Mothers are especially important in defending morality, as they influence future generations. She argued that women who have children out of wedlock must not be allowed into society. Society, of which "Marjorie" considered herself part, must keep these women out; they contaminated the morality of the society. It was up to women like "Marjorie" to work towards virtuous womanhood. "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, March 10-11, 1932, 2. She also positioned herself as responsible for educating women on their manners. "Marjorie Mensah" and one of Accra's "foremost ladies in town" suggested that local women talked too loud and were in some cases "extremely noisy." To speak loudly was to speak like a "cloth woman," which "Marjorie" declared inappropriate for the streets of Accra and "most unbecoming to a drawing room." "Marjorie" suggested that her readers learn to speak more softly like European women, who she claimed had reached a standard of perfection in voice and tone. She warned that if the Gold Coast African failed to absorb the lessons learned from Europeans, they would remain a source of amusement for the world. "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, May 18, 1931, 2.

policy of indirect rule was “non-interventionist in scope,” meaning that British officials were primarily concerned with the regulation and support of indigenous rulers rather than with the restructuring of native institutions.⁴¹⁹

The non-interventionist approach changed during the 1920s as Governor Guggisberg’s administration took a more active approach to indirect rule by restructuring and defining native institutions through the Gold Coast Constitution of 1925 and the Native Administration Ordinance of 1927.⁴²⁰ These documents further articulated the native state, and substantially increased the power and authority of African Chiefs while minimizing the political role of the university-educated Africans. The new constitution expanded the Legislative Council to include additional seats for chiefs, keeping seats for western-educated men (the “Gold Coast intelligentsia”) at three and doubling the seats for chiefs (to six). The constitution also introduced the concept of the three Provincial Councils of chiefs, which the African elite contested as a system that had no parallel to pre-colonial political structures. As the university-educated group was apt to point out, these changes to the native state not only favored African chiefs, but gave them autocratic powers that they did not have in the pre-colonial past and intensified the already strained relationship between politically ambitious university-educated Africans and African

⁴¹⁹ Roger Gocking, “Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast,” 431-32. Gocking uses Robert Stone’s description of indirect rule as “non-interventionist.” Robert Stone, “Colonial Administration in South Central Ghana, 1919-1951” (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1975), 34-36.

⁴²⁰ Roger Gocking describes the colonial government’s efforts to control the native state as the “official invention of tradition” in West Africa. As Gocking argues, the process of inventing tradition in the Gold Coast, however, was a much more dynamic process that involved many actors from different ethnic and social groups. Other participants included western-educated Gold Coast Africans and chiefs from various ethnic and social groups who, in relation to colonial policy, introduced their own invented traditions and native customs. The official invention of tradition benefited some men and elders. “Elders used this tradition to dominate the rural means of production in the face of challenges from young men. Men, in general, did so to maintain economic and social control over women; paramount chiefs and ruling aristocracies to maintain and extend their control over their subjects; while indigenous populations appealed to tradition in order to prevent migrants who settled among them from achieving political and economic rights” Roger Gocking, “Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast,” 423, 441.

chiefs. The university-educated group claimed that the pre-colonial system was more democratic than the system invented through colonial constitutions and ordinances, and argued that indirect rule was incompatible with native institutions.⁴²¹ In their efforts to retain their political power, elite men were reported to have prevented chiefs from attending political meetings and from being elected to the Legislative Council. While the colonial government had hoped these changes would lead to a more streamlined and static native state, the fierce competition among locals introduced through these documents made this goal virtually impossible.⁴²²

The restructuring of indirect rule in the Gold Coast combined with a critical shift in European attitudes towards university-educated Africans. As Roger Gocking describes, “instead of seeing such Africans as important partners in the spread of Western civilization, both the mission churches and colonial administrators began to relegate them more and more to junior positions in the colonial order.”⁴²³ Fueling their new attitude towards this group during the 1920s was a new economic agenda for Britain’s colonies in Africa. This was especially true in the Gold Coast where economic developments after World War I introduced new employment opportunities for Europeans. European men and a smaller number of women were eager to compete for these positions, especially as advancements in tropical medicine had enabled Europeans to live in the tropics for longer periods of time. When these new employment opportunities became available, the colonial government filled them with European workers instead of university-educated

⁴²¹ Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 130.

⁴²² Roger Gocking notes that the competition between western-educated Gold Coasters and chiefs was steep and was not confined to Sekondi, Cape Coast, or Accra, but was a problem throughout the territory.

⁴²³ Roger Gocking, “Creole Society and the Revival of Traditional Culture in Cape Coast during the Colonial Period,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17, 4 (1984): 605.

Africans. The British appropriated the pseudo-scientific racism that was gaining legitimacy and momentum in Europe, and used it to justify their employment of British men and women over equally, if not more qualified Africans in the Colony. The increase in the number of European workers in the country and the restructuring of the native state virtually eliminated the British educated West African elite from the economic and political life of the Gold Coast. These developments challenged the political aspirations of university-educated Africans, who prior to 1925, had every reason to believe that they would play a significant role in the governance of the country. In response to their increasing political marginalization, this group began to disinvest in governmental power structures and to reinvest in the public sphere of newspapers and literary, social, and political associations.

At the end of the 1920s, university graduates recently returned from the United Kingdom and the United States began a new political project that would both rival the colonial policy of indirect rule and the Christian mission to “civilize.” Using newspapers, school boards, town councils, and the other informal political structures, this group launched their own campaigns for leadership over the Gold Coast. They argued they were better prepared than chiefs or Europeans to lead the Gold Coast (and Africa) into the modern world. They insisted that their status as western-educated Africans allowed them the possibility of combining the very best of western and “traditional” African culture to produce a modern Africa. Their target population included Accra’s locally-educated group. Their newspapers became essential to their reforming and molding this group, using the advice columns to encourage these men and a very small number of women to adopt their mannerisms, lifestyle, and morals. At the same time,

locally-educated readers (who did not control the press) used the newspapers, particularly the spaces most available to them—the readers’ letter sections, and to lay claim to their own identities as English-literate and western-educated Africans.

Accra’s Newspapers

While many of Accra’s African-owned Anglophone newspapers claimed to represent the “voice of the Gold Coast people,” these papers, at least until the mid-1930s, catered almost exclusively to African professionals. J. E. Casely Hayford, J. B. Herbert Brown, John Mensah Sarbah, James Hutton Brew, Rev. Samuel Brew, and Reverend Kobina Fynn Ekyir Asaam, are among the men who controlled the Gold Coast press (mainly Cape Coast) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These men came from established and wealthy coastal families and most had obtained degrees in higher education at universities in England. Many of them worked as barristers and medical doctors while managing their papers. All of them participated in town politics through their membership in the Aboriginal Rights Protection Society, the National Congress for British West Africa, the Legislative Council, and local town councils. Their newspapers reflected the interests and concerns of their readers who, at this time and at least until the mid-1920s, were men of their own class.

The university-educated group (and wealthy businessmen) who founded the papers of the 1930s cultivated a different kind of press from the one established by previous generations. While certainly borrowing elements from the press of the earlier period, the newspaper owners and editors of the 1930s were self-consciously engaged in

forming a different kind of press, one that K. A. B. Quartey defines as part of a new phase in Gold Coast journalism—a “modern” era marked by the proliferation of popular newspapers each engaged in fierce competition with each other for revenue from a small community of readers and advertisers.⁴²⁴

Different from the earlier press, these papers appealed to a diversity of readers’ interests, and were cosmopolitan in their content; they featured local news items, as well as international, regional, and imperial news. In terms of local news, the papers tended to focus on issues relevant to professional Africans, though some papers incorporated information and news relevant to the locally-educated office clerks. Writers wrote on behalf of Gold Coasters and Africa, and sometimes positioned themselves as members of the British Empire, but only rarely did writers make claims in the press based on local ethnic identities. As the content and style of their papers suggest, the owners and editors of the 1930s, many of whom studied abroad, were deeply influenced by the popular press of the 1920s in England and in other parts of the world. Owing to the fact that many of these men studied in England, it is likely the greatest influence came from the post-World War I press, a press that was itself under transformation as women and others entered its fold in greater numbers.

Women’s presence in the British press was already established by this time through the persistent press coverage of the women’s suffrage movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, women’s relationship to the press changed in the 1920s. Newspapers of this decade actively targeted women readers by

⁴²⁴ Jones-Quartey, *A Summary History of the Ghana Press*; Jones-Quartey, *History, Politics and Early Press in Ghana*; and Audrey Sitsofe Gadzekpo, “Women's Engagement with Gold Coast Print Culture from 1857 to 1957” (PhD Diss., University of Birmingham, 2001).

expanding their women's pages and integrating "women's" issues into the main body of their daily and weekly papers. During the 1930s, as the Great Depression made it even more difficult to sell papers, many began to include "amusing" articles on the differences between the sexes, local gossip, sporting news, celebrity interviews, and fashion sketches.

The incorporation of women-centered news into the main body of English newspapers blurred the boundary between national concerns and women's issues.⁴²⁵ British women's presence in the press as a critical sign of a new modernity might have inspired the amount of attention Gold Coast papers paid to women and "women's issues." Papers frequently featured articles on women and womanhood, and also carried debates on differences between the sexes. African writers discussed women's roles as mothers and wives, their education and contribution to local society, and the more expansive part they might play in their relationship to the progress of the Gold Coast people and the African race.⁴²⁶

Newspaper writers certainly borrowed discursive and technical practices from the British press. However, writers quickly adapted these practices to suit their situation and class ambitions in Accra. Pen-names and anonymously authored texts were standard features of Accra's daily and weekly papers. Audrey Gadzekpo speculates that pen-names enabled writers to articulate anti-colonial arguments in the press, which during the 1930s had become increasingly dangerous as colonial authorities increased surveillance

⁴²⁵ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, modernity, and the popular press in inter-war Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 39.

⁴²⁶ One Gold Coast writer stated that the education of women was to be "regarded as a matter of national importance." African men's progress was also viewed as inextricable from African women's. He wrote, ". . . the more completely the powers of both [men and women] are developed, the more harmonious and well ordered will society be—the more safe and certain its elevation and advancement." He warned his readers that "[w]here she [woman] is debased, society is debased; where she is morally pure and enlightened, society will be proportionally elevated," concluding that ". . . Nations are but the outcomes of Homes, and Peoples of Mothers." J.C.B.Z., "True Space of Women," *West African Times*, June 16, 1931, 2.

of the African press and enforced sedition laws in the Colony. During the 1930s most articles, letters, and editorials in the paper did not carry by-lines, and those that did were signed under pseudonyms. It was common for a letter writer, for example, to sign a letter “A. Native” or “A True African.”

As these pseudonyms suggest, names were also used to communicate information that only some readers understood, and helped to define insider and outsider status among English-literate Africans. Pen-names and pseudonyms protected writers from colonial sedition laws and also enabled a small staff of newspaper writers to appear much larger and more diverse than it actually was. Through the use of fictional names, a paper with only two staff writers could produce several unique columns—each of which would claim a different news personality and perspective. In the case of the *West Africa Times*, the editorial page offered a men’s column, a women’s column, a society/gossip column, and an editorial. When the paper first began, it had an editor and one staff writer who were responsible for the daily publication of a four-page broadsheet that contained local and international news in addition to their original columns. Considering that the manager of the paper continued his career as a lawyer, it was likely that a single person was responsible for several different sections of the paper.

Pen-names, pseudonyms and other practices of anonymity also allowed this small group of writers to inhabit several identities in the press at once, introducing elements of play and inventiveness in the Gold Coast press. It also allowed men and women the opportunity to imaginatively order their social worlds, or rather to write how the world ought to be ordered. Through the men’s and women’s columns, in particular, these writers organized their social worlds and public spaces along gender lines, assigning

women and men different roles and responsibilities. Critically, these gendered columns worked together to define a gendered world in which men worried about “political” affairs and women concerned themselves with “moral” and “social” issues and reform.

This was also a period in which a number of new African-initiated newspapers were launched. While many of these papers expired not long after they began publishing, they nevertheless contributed to the variety and intensity of debate within the public sphere. The strongest and most widely circulated newspapers of this decade belonged to one of the three primary newspaper companies in Accra: the Guinea Times Publishing Company, the Independent Press, and the City Press. The Guinea Times Publishing Company owned the *West Africa Times* (renamed *Times of West Africa* in 1932) that was started by Dr. J. B. Danquah, the editor-in-chief. He was assisted by West Indian-born writer Kenneth MacNeill Stewart who edited the paper in 1931 and parts of 1932 and 33, and again in 1934 until the paper’s closing in the early months of 1935. Stewart also edited and wrote for papers owned by the Independent Press and published poems and ballads.⁴²⁷ The City Press was owned by the wealthy African businessman Alfred J. Ocansey.⁴²⁸ It published the *Gold Coast Spectator* and the *African Morning Post*. The Independent Press owned the *Gold Coast Independent* and the *Daily Echo*. The *West Africa Times* named the *Gold Coast Independent* the leader in national weekly papers, with the *Gold Coast Spectator* in second place in July 1931.⁴²⁹ During the 1930s, the five

⁴²⁷ The *Times* paper stopped publishing in the first months of 1935. Information about Stewart obtained from K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, “Press and Nationalism in Ghana,” *United Asia* (1957), 58.

⁴²⁸ In addition to owning the City Press, A. J. Ocansey was well known in the cocoa, transport, and entertainment industries. Jones-Quartey, *A Summary History of the Ghana Press*, 24.

⁴²⁹ “Dairy of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, July 13, 1931, 2.

main newspapers (in English) were: *Gold Coast Spectator*, the *Gold Coast Independent*, *Daily Echo*, *West Africa Times*, and *African Morning Post*.⁴³⁰

The general character of these papers contrasted sharply with the African newspapers published in Cape Coast and Accra during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While a small group of highly-educated men continued to control the press of the interwar years, the press of this period appealed to the wider audience of Accra's readers. Unlike the papers of the late nineteenth century, these papers were not attached to a single political issue or organization, and their survival depended on advertisers and readers.⁴³¹ In order to attract a diversity of readers, these papers published local, international, and imperial news, and nearly all had a women's page.

Absent from the secondary literature on the Gold Coast press of the 1930s is an analysis of the different target audiences for these papers. In my research on the content and advertisements of the five main papers published in Accra during the thirties, I have found these newspapers catered to different communities within the English-literate group. Newspapers published by the Guinea Times Publishing Company and the Independent Press catered to Accra's professional Africans; these papers were, in fact, instrumental to the consolidation of a class identity among professionals, a process that involved the creation of other classes among Accra's English-literate residents. In the

⁴³⁰ Jones-Quartey, "Press and Nationalism in Ghana," 58. British newspapers were also read in Accra, including the *Daily Mail* and a handful of "Penny dreadfuls" from England. The *Daily Mail* is referenced in "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, September 3, 1931, 2. In this article, the author discussed the July 1932 issue of the *Daily Mail*, which provides additional clues to the delay between the publication of texts in England and their arrival in Accra. The "Penny dreadfuls" (sensational newspapers) are mentioned in "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *Times of West Africa*, January 22, 1932, 2.

⁴³¹ Some papers, such as the *West Africa Times* tailored their articles and news to professional African elite (e.g., lawyers, politicians, medical doctors), while others, like the *Gold Coast Spectator* included features that appealed to members of the clerk class (e.g., teachers, office clerks, police officers, and catechists).

following chapter, I analyze class formation in the newspapers of the Guinea Times Publishing Company. Newspapers belonging to the City Press group were less exclusive and in some cases catered to locally-educated grammar school graduates, covering news items and articles relevant to teachers, catechists, and clerks. All five papers reported high circulation figures and had an active readership, many of whom frequently submitted letters to the papers' editors.⁴³² These five main papers competed for revenue from advertisements and subscribers. The papers' editors frequently criticized each others' papers, with rivalry between *West Africa Times* and *Gold Coast Spectator* being particularly intense between 1931 and 1934.⁴³³

At the beginning of the decade, among the more self-consciously modern papers invested in the promotion of an educated African identity and culture was the *West Africa Times*. It was the first African-owned daily paper to be published on a consistent and regular basis.⁴³⁴ The *Times* began publication in March 1931 under the editorial management of the Gold Coast barrister and Ph.D. in ethics, Dr. J. B. Danquah and a managing director of the Guinea Times Publishing Company Mr. J. H. Coussey (also a Gold Coast barrister and judge).⁴³⁵ The paper's first editor was Kenneth MacNeill Stewart. One reader compared the *Times* to England's national newspapers, noting that it

⁴³² *West Africa Times* was edited by Dr. J. B. Danquah; the *Gold Coast Independent* was edited by D. G. Tackie; the *Gold Coast Spectator* was edited by R. B. Wuta-Ofei; and the *African Morning Post* was edited by Nnamdi Azikiwe. All of these men studied abroad where they completed degrees in higher education.

⁴³³ Writers of *West Africa Times* accused writers of the *Gold Coast Spectator* of being poorly qualified journalists. The question of "Marjorie Mensah's" sexual identity is one illustration of the type of dialogue these two papers engaged.

⁴³⁴ Jones-Quartey states that this was not the first African-owned daily, despite the fact that the *West Africa Times* claimed otherwise. *West Africa Times* was the first consistently published daily.

⁴³⁵ Information on the publisher and names associated with the *West Africa Times* (*Times of West Africa*) is from news reports on a court case between MacNeill Stewart and the Guinea Times Publishing Co. in May 1934. See, "Mr Stewart versus Guinea Times," *The Gold Coast Independent*, May 12, 1934, 444. Roger Gocking identifies J. H. Coussey as the colony's "most senior African member of the judiciary" during the 1940s. Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, 87.

had all the features of a modern daily, and “not to be behind the times, it has its ‘Ladies Corner.’”⁴³⁶ The paper covered international news, inter-colonial news, and local news. It contained women’s and men’s columns that featured local gossip, political analysis and advice. Provided the high circulation figure, the paper’s audience was necessarily diverse and included readers of all education levels. An analysis of its advertisements, which featured high priced items such as cars, liquor, guns, and imported foods and cigarettes, and of the paper’s content, which consisted of articles on elite dances and marriages, strongly suggests that the paper’s intended audience was the university-educated professional group—a group that one writer for paper referred to as Accra’s “upper set.”⁴³⁷ The paper offers a rich historical record of exclusive and exclusive social events, including those that were held at the Christiansborg Castle and the Rodger Club. It featured articles by western-educated African women and a regular women’s column. Its most popular column was the “Ladies’ Column” by “Marjorie Mensah.” “Marjorie,” as discussed in the following chapters, covered a variety of topics from the political ideas and activities of the Pankhurst sisters to the latest fashions from Paris, London, and New York with references to the fashion styles of various “women of Empire,” particularly Indian women’s dress, or “national costume.”⁴³⁸ The *Gold Coast Independent* was a weekly paper that was also owned by the Independent Press. Its coverage and target audience was similar to the *West Africa Times*. It featured news items and columns similar to those carried in the *West Africa Times*.

⁴³⁶ Marjorie Mensah and Kathleen Hewitt, *Us Women*, (London: E. Mathews & Marrot Ltd, 1933), 5.

⁴³⁷ “Zadig” uses the term “upper set.” The writer also referred to professionals as “Society.”

⁴³⁸ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, May 12, 1931, 2; “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, November 23, 1931, 2; and “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 23, 1931, 2. See also the same column June 29, 1931, 2.

The papers belonging to the City Press were more diverse in their news coverage and editorial content. Judging by its advertisements and content, the intended audience for the *Gold Coast Spectator* were the locally-educated pastors, teachers, store keepers, mercantile and government clerks. The paper reported on “high” and “low” social and leisure activities including literary club meetings, sporting events, dances, in addition to analyses of local issues, religion, education, and imperial and colonial news. It emphasized information on local schools, and published articles that directly concerned teachers and clerks.⁴³⁹ The *African Morning Post*, also owned by the City Press, was slightly different from the *Spectator*. It began publication in 1934 under the editorial direction of Nigerian-born Nnamdi Azikiwe, who graduated from Lincoln University and the University of Pennsylvania in the United States.⁴⁴⁰ The target audience of this paper included both the university-educated and grammar school graduates and it was more political in content than the other three papers. It did, however, contain similar kinds of information from local and international sources, and like the other papers, it included a

⁴³⁹ An analysis of issues published between 1937 and 1938 indicates that teachers and clerks were the target audience of this paper. There are numerous articles on club events, from sporting clubs to reading circles. The majority of articles focus on school news and education in the colony. Special columns focused on religion, women, dancing, education, and local news and events. Interspersed throughout the paper are news items from around the world, including England, Austria, Japan, China, Ethiopia, and the United States. The paper also emphasizes Christian events and news, including announcements related to Christian choirs, schools, and organizations. In terms of content, the paper places more emphasis on local news and events than the *West Africa Times* or the *African Morning Post* (both of which offer international and local news, with more international coverage than the *Gold Coast Spectator*). Note: the only existing copies of this paper are issues published between 1937 and 1938. Information about the paper before 1937 relies on references to the paper found in other newspapers from the time period under consideration.

⁴⁴⁰ A. J. Ocansey financed the *African Morning Post*. Brew, J. E. Casely Hayford, Mensah Sarbah, Samuel Richard Brew (A. K. A. Attoh Ahuma) were all members of the Aboriginal Rights Protection Society (ARPS). They argued for self-government. Ocansey was also a member of the Ashanti Cocoa Federation. He employed Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to run his *African Morning Post*. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe studied at Howard University and graduated from Lincoln University, Pennsylvania. He also obtained an M.A. degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1933. Azikiwe edited the *West African Pilot* in Nigeria after being deported from the Gold Coast with Wallace-Johnson after being charged under the Sedition Ordinance of 1934. He was the first president of Nigeria. Gadzekpo, “Women's Engagement with Gold Coast Print Culture from 1857 to 1957,” 74-6.

woman's page. The *African Morning Post* was known for its fiery personality and anti-colonial content. The paper's manager, Azikiwe, was charged with sedition in 1936 for an article that appeared in the paper by I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson. As was true of all papers from this period, irrespective of their intended audiences, the *African Morning Post* was invested in the project of defining a new Africa, that is, leading Africa into a new age, while at the same time shaping what the new Africa would be. Exactly what the "new" was and would be was hotly contested by writers and readers within and between these different newspapers. Gender and sexuality, as explored in the following chapters, played a critical role in these discussions of modernity and nationhood.

While the majority of newspaper articles and editorials continued to reflect the experiences and opinions of university-educated professionals, the readers' letters sections of the newspaper enabled locally-educated men and western-educated women to participate in newspaper debates, offering their own opinions and providing insight into their social and economic realities. In their letters, they discussed occupational concerns (e.g., teacher's salaries, the treatment of Africans in the civil service), local issues (e.g., town elections, the income tax proposition, club meetings), and controversial topics of debate (e.g., women's education, witchcraft, and social progress).⁴⁴¹ It was also common for readers to write responses to other readers' letters and for major debates to be discussed through letters published in rival papers. Newspaper writers interacted with these letters by making reference to them in their columns and editorials. Newspapers,

⁴⁴¹ Letters of inquiry into "Marjorie Mensah's" identity were written by men and women from both groups. The debate split along class lines, with mission and government school graduates claiming that "Marjorie" was the penname of a male author, while university/foreign educated readers and newspaper writers supported her female identity. Witchcraft was another topic of debate that prompted many letters. See Chapter 6.

therefore, were dialogic spaces in which a diversity of readers and staff writers debated political and social issues.

Thus, with the exception of a few exclusive venues, the Rodger Club where leaders of Accra society mingled or the Christiansborg Castle, the enclave of British colonial officials, Accra's public sphere was characterized by a lively exchange among a broad spectrum of educated Africans. Locally-educated men (and a few women) joined clubs and sent letters to the press in the service of proving and improving their literacy in English. They involved themselves in activities that frequently intersected with those of African professionals. They read the local papers, submitted letters and articles to them, and created their own literary, social, and political clubs.⁴⁴² They were deeply invested in education, and used literary clubs, newspapers, books, and postal degree courses to extend their education beyond the training they had received at local schools. They used these different resources to advance their education in order to improve their employment and salary options, but also to demonstrate their "civilization." For members of this group, to be "civilized" meant to extend one's intellectual "horizons beyond the confines of [one's own] country," to be informed about the latest news from around the world, and to engage in discussions of local social problems, especially those that resonated with social problems common to other "modern" societies.⁴⁴³ In addition to their own investment in this space as a site of learning and performing a modern educated identity, these men saw their public engagement with literary texts and issues of social reform as critical to the production of a modern respected Africa and public sphere—and thus,

⁴⁴² Some, mainly secondary school graduates and wealthy merchants, occasionally attended events sponsored by the more elite clubs.

⁴⁴³ This statement was made by Henry Ofori, a reader during the 1930s, in an interview with Newell. Newell, "Entering the Territory of Elites," 211.

critical to West Africa's advancement to self-government and commonwealth participation.

While deeply influenced by the university-educated men who edited the majority of Accra's newspapers, locally-educated men often publicly disagreed with them about social problems and proposals for "social reform." They boldly engaged with newspaper writers on issues of social concern that were central both to highly-educated men's image of a modern Africa and to less elite Africans' aspirations by contesting their vision of a educated African identity, the status of women, the performance of socially appropriate and gender roles, and family relations. The clubs, as Stephanie Newell argues, played a key role in facilitating this group's engagement with these issues along with the general practice of publishing readers' letters. The formation of newspapers like the *Gold Coast Spectator* that favored news and information relevant to teachers and clerks provided locally-educated men additional inroads into the discussions that were taking place not only in the main sections of newspapers, but in exclusive clubs, social venues, and the Legislative Council. Newspaper editors and writers often set the agenda for what would be discussed in the press and staged public debate on social problems; however, letter writers were also known to incite their own controversies in the press, a prime example being the multi-paper controversy that surrounded the question of "Marjorie Mensah's" gender identity (see Chapter 6). Once controversies began, they took on lives of their own and editorial control became compromised. Newspaper editors did little to discourage the presence of controversy in the press. In fact, they frequently worked to facilitate feuds.

Newspapers, when analyzed in relation to the club scene, reveal a rich discursive field of in which all levels of readers and writers negotiated and re-imagined power relationships that would serve as the foundation for a new Africa.⁴⁴⁴ As will be discussed in the following chapters, public discussions of men's and women's education, African womanhood, marriage and family systems, and romance and love became core concerns and their debate in the public arena gave rise to multiple visions of a new Africa, as well as the creation of class difference within the English-literate group. The central focus of the next chapter is how elite newspaper owners and writers strategically used newspapers to form a modern African identity that was highly classed and gendered, and how this identity fit into their vision for a new Africa. In my analysis of this process, I focus on the *West Africa Times*, an elite-owned paper that had strong ties to West African students in London. By focusing on the *Times*, I analyze the process of identity and cultural formations as the product of a particular class of highly-educated writers, many of whom had studied abroad and continued to maintain their connections to West African students in London and to the political and cultural projects associated with WASU.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴ By new Africa, I am referring to the educated elites' vision for a modern Africa nation as an independent nation within a reformed Empire. During the early part of the decade, the new Africa was referred to a "New Age." The term "New Africa," however, was developed by Azikiwe during the second half of the 1930s in his work as the editor of the *African Morning Post*, and in his book *Renascent African*. For Azikiwe, the New Africa meant turning away from the "Old Africa" of chiefs and ethnic affiliations. The New Africa, he argued, "must consist of Africans and human beings, not just Fanti or Ga, Temne or Mende, Yoruba or Ibo, Bantu or Tureg, Bubi or Hausa, Jollof or Kru." This project required a collective and conscious effort to remodel social life, and like J. B. Danquah, he believed a New Africa would not happen overnight, but would arrive in phases. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 116-24.

⁴⁴⁵ I refer to the *Gold Coast Independent* and the *African Morning Post*, as well as the *Gold Coast Spectator* when relevant. Unfortunately, issues of the *Gold Coast Spectator* from the early 1930s are not currently available. As documented in the *Times*, the paper offered its own contribution to the issues raised in the press and clubs. The *Gold Coast Spectator* began in 1927 under the editorial direction of R. W. Dupigny and ceased publication in 1939. The few issues of this paper available on microfilm are for part of 1937, 38, and 39. Years available on microfilm at the Balme Library at the University of Ghana, Legon include: Oct. 1937-Sept. 1938 and Jan., 4 – Feb., 28, 1839. Held at: MA100/Dp/AN9.g5 G 57 at the Africana Microfilm Library. Microfilm for these years is also available at the Colindale newspaper library in London and through the Center for Research Libraries in the U.S.

Chapter 5

Creating Accra “Society” in the *West Africa Times*

By the 1930s, Accra’s West African public sphere saw new additions to its institutions. The period was marked by a proliferation of clubs, an increase in the arrival of books, products, and people from abroad, and the establishment of a new urban press. Most critically, the number of actors involved in this arena increased and the collective profile of the “average” reader diversified. The much larger and more diverse public sphere of the 1930s was better prepared to lobby the colonial government and implement political change. At the same time, the addition of new members together with the introduction of influences and ideas from Atlantic and imperial trading networks meant that university-educated Africans had less control over defining a new nation. To gain control of this increasingly stratified public sphere and the visions of nationhood expressed within it, elite men and women used the press to hone their identity as elite Africans and position themselves as leaders of “public opinion.” They referred to themselves as members of a select group that they called Accra “Society” and constructed locally-educated readers as promising young citizens in need of their guidance.

Elite effort to dominate the public sphere and the constructions of gender, modernity and nation that formed within it, however, met with resistance. Africans of all reading levels and educational experiences brought their own ideas about sexuality,

gender, modernity, and marital and family relationships into the public sphere and in this way were critical contributors to the construction of a new Africa. The discussion of these issues in the press intensified and changed over the course of the decade as new ideas entered the public sphere through American cinema and books from around the world, and as people from other parts of West Africa arrived in Accra after having studied in the United States and Europe prepared to undertake their own political and cultural experimentations within the West African public sphere.

The core of the West African public sphere in Accra was the new urban press that began in the early 1930s and was modeled after the popular and daily national presses (mainly European) of the interwar period. The structure, style and content of these papers helped form a public arena in which people of all reading levels participated in discussions critical to the formation of an educated citizenry and nation. They featured local news items, including announcements for club meetings, weddings, and sporting events, readers' letters, and editorials. They were also cosmopolitan in their content, including international, regional, and imperial news. The publication of readers' letters further demonstrated the diversity of Accra's educated group and stimulated debate between its different segments, drawing otherwise marginalized readers into the public sphere. The practice of participating in public debate through letters and articles was a form of citizenship that was critical to the establishment of the type of nation West African intellectuals associated with WASU and the *Times* were aiming for. All of these aspects of the new urban press showed elite newspaper writers as cosmopolitan intellectuals catering to an increasingly diverse reading public that the elite hoped would be the citizens of a future self-governing West African nation.

Differences between elite university-educated West Africans and locally-educated readers did not escape newspaper attention however, and, indeed some newspapers appear to have actively encouraged disputes as a way of increasing readership. Newspaper owners' encouragement of dialogue and debate in the press was as much for the practical goal of stimulating public discourse, and bringing into focus a visible educated and "modern" African presence in the coastal cities for British and world audiences. Educated Africans' discourse on what they referred to as "modern" social problems in the press showed them drawing from a diversity of world resources, including philosophical, literary, and religious texts. Their use of these resources was critical to the formation of an educated citizenry and West African identity and presence that was inherently anti-colonial.

The "Africa" that the educated elite were creating in the Anglophone West African public sphere opposed the "Africa" associated with Britain's post-war policies of indirect rule. Indirect rule had divided the colonies into a world of primitive agricultural villages governed by so-called traditional chiefs and an urban Africa (the coastal cities) controlled by British business and colonial officials. The "Africa" that educated and literate West Africans were busily engaged in creating both escaped and disproved the British paradigm by assembling an urban(e) and commercial Africa in which Africans were completely at home. By cultivating their own distinct Anglophone West African public sphere and within it nationhood, they opened an alternative political arena to those associated with African chiefs and the colonial government. Its distance and difference from both enabled the educated elite a space in which to form their own "public opinion" that could pressure chiefs and British administrators, and also their own "nation" that had

the potential to replace the system of indirect rule (the British colonial bureaucracy and the African chieftaincy) entirely.

At the same time that the press presented a wide-range of opinions and encouraged reader response, it constructed an exclusive and elite African identity that excluded and set them apart from the majority of readers. Yet, these writers' articulations of exclusive African "Society" in the paper required the presence of the locally-educated readers. The locally-educated reader provided an internal other to educated elites. Elites used this group, whom they patronized, to establish their authority over the construction of a new nation. At the same time, the educated elite pointed to locally-educated readers as evidence of an emergent critical mass of educated citizens in their arguments to the British for representative government. All of this, I argue, was carried out in the service of working towards the creation a united West African nation, replete with an educated and engaged citizenry.

This chapter considers how elites used one of Accra's first daily African-owned newspapers and example of the new urban press, the *West Africa Times*, to reaffirm their leadership within the African public sphere. I focus on the *West Africa Times* because it was owned and edited by members of Accra's highly-educated professional group, Dr. J. B. Danquah, the first president of WASU, and Gold Coast lawyer and judge, James Coussey. The *Times* was deeply invested in creating difference between an educate elite of university graduates and a group of middling readers that were educated at local grammar schools. Some local readers accused the paper's writers of over stepping their authority by declaring themselves the leaders of "all things literary" in the Colony.

Indeed, writers used the paper to display their educated culture to world audiences, and their class status and authority over the public sphere.

An important part of nation making for this cohort of educated elite was the re-making of Accra's locally-educated group in their own image—but not quite. Elite editors and contributors filled the pages of the *Times* with advice and criticism aimed to reform the locally-educated group's ideas about gender and sexuality to conform to their own ideas (ideals that I argue formed the core of the elites' vision of a West African nation). Writers critiqued their manners, occupational choices, sexuality and marriage patterns, spending habits, and leisure activities, establishing new expectations for the locally-educated group to aspire to, and reaffirming the class difference. The *Times* routinely placed critiques of the locally-educated side by side with headlines announcing “Society” weddings, dances, lectures, and club meetings along with articles on “Society” affairs that named Accra's “A-list” people. The paper's daily society column, “Castle and Society,” was particularly helpful to the formation of an elite identity. It announced “select” events—dances “by invitation only,” political functions, literary club meetings, debates, weddings, and private house parties.⁴⁴⁶

The *Times* thus separated highly-educated Africans from locally-educated men, and created class aspirations for the locally-educated group. These displays and performances of “Society” in the *Times* (and also in the *Gold Coast Independent* and at the Rodger Club and other “exclusive” venues and social events) were linked to the formation of a West African nation. In the new nation, the educated elite imagined that they would not only translate “Africa” to the world, but guide Africa onto the world stage

⁴⁴⁶ Family names which regularly appeared in the column were Ribeiros, Dove, Quartey-Papafio, Glover-Addo, Quist, and Vanderpuye.

(in this case as Anglophone West Africans).⁴⁴⁷ Ostensibly, their critiques were issued in the service of the social improvement of all urban West Africans. How else could they legitimate their demand for West Africa's greater autonomy within the Empire?

Accra's middling readers, not surprisingly, found the elite expectations, especially in relation to sexuality and marriage, unrealistic. They deluged the *Times* and other elite directed newspapers with letters of protest. In this way, elite and locally-educated Accrans entered into a heated debate about the gender relations that would form the foundation of an independent African nation. Their letters introduced information and opinions from other newspapers, local events, and their personal experience. Newspaper journalists often responded to readers' letters in their daily columns. We find this most frequently in the gendered sections of the paper—the men's column called "Diary of a man About Town" by the paper's editor who used the penname "Zadig," and the women's column called "Ladies' Corner" that was multiply authored by men and women writers under the penname "Marjorie Mensah."

Through the course of the paper's life (1931-5), these columns provided a productive discursive space in which elite newspaper owners and writers and locally-educated readers negotiated nationhood. Gender, as discussed throughout this chapter, became a critical resource in elite constructions of nationhood and class difference. In addition, readers and writers drew from other sections of the paper and information and ideas obtained from newspapers other than the *Times*. Also in the backdrop were African chiefs and British officials whose presence and, at times, intentional absence from

⁴⁴⁷ A few years later Azikiwe will discuss this period as "the Renaissance of Africans and the reformation of African society." Making the transition between the old and new Africa were the men and women Azikiwe called "Renascent Africans" who existed in transition between both. K. A. B. Quartey-Jones, *A Life of Azikiwe* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 119.

newspaper constructions of “Society” were both equally important to elite identity formation.

Creating “Society” in the *West Africa Times*

In July 1931, a writer using the penname “Mr. Tommy Blues” published an article in the *Gold Coast Spectator* in which he suggested that anyone belonging to a literary club qualified as a member of “Society.” Mr. Blues had taken his definition of society from “Zadig,” a columnist for the *West Africa Times*. “Zadig” (also a penname) authored a daily men’s column in the paper called “Diary of a Man About Town.”⁴⁴⁸ After reading Mr. Blues’ interpretation of his own definition of society, “Zadig” wrote, Mr. Blues “has got thoroughly mixed up over my note on society the other day,” so much so that he mistakenly believes that “a member of a literary club is *ipso [facto]* a member of society, and that an invitation from the Ga Mantse [the king or paramount chief of the Ga people] to a social function implies recognition as a member of society.” According to “Zadig,” neither one would qualify a man’s entry into “Society.” Narrowing his definition, “Zadig” wrote, “[i]t is true that when a person belongs to a literary club, he belongs to a society, but that is a totally different sort of society from ‘Society’ in the sense it is used of the fashionable world.” As for receiving an invitation from the Ga Mantse, “Zadig” explained that there was a difference between state and society functions; a state assembly had “nothing to do with society as such.” Although the “highest in society are [often] the highest in a particular State affair,” the situation in Accra was different.

⁴⁴⁸ At this time, the primary user of this penname was the *Times*’s managing editor J. B. Danquah.

According to “Zadig,” the James Town Mantse’s annual ‘Odwira’ did not count as a “society affair.” Accra African “Society” did not revolve around the Native Administration. It was separate from the African chieftaincy formed its own place alongside the “Castle” (British officials).

“Zadig” speculated that Mr. Blues’ “confusion” over this point stemmed from the fact that there were “many levels of society in Accra,” but the society that he had in mind was an “exclusive” one, and “not the one in which ‘Tom, Dick, and Harry’ are all welcome visitors.” Certainly, he claimed, “[o]ne would not call a society exclusive in which a cook can exchange ladies with his master in a dance hall.” Qualification for entrance into “Society” was tied to membership at the African Rodger Club. The Club required “good character” and an annual income that approached three figures.⁴⁴⁹

University-educated lawyers, doctors, politicians, school headmasters, and their wives in addition to single women from wealthy and “respected families” were members of the Rodger Club.⁴⁵⁰ Dances and musicals at the Club were reported to be “very select” and usually by invitation only; when open to the public, tickets were expensive.⁴⁵¹ Few, if any, locally-educated men would have been invited to attend Club events. Invitation, particularly for men, was largely limited to members of the elite Rodger Club.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁹ “Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, July 13, 1931, 2.

⁴⁵⁰ The following is an example of the guest list for a typical Rodger Club event: A Rodger Club dance was sponsored by the Ladies Section of the NCBWA in honor of Gold Coast Tennis, Cricket and Billiard players who went to Nigeria. The paper reported notable guests Glover-Addo, Nanka-Bruce, E.C. Quist (esq.), A. Sawyer (esq.), Francis Dove (esq.), Dr. Murrell, Kitson-Mills, Mr. Joseph, Buckle, Victor Tettey, and a host of Europeans. Mr. Joseph was a cricketer. Mr. Tettey was the captain of the tennis team. *Gold Coast Independent*, May 2, 1931, 562.

⁴⁵¹ Dance organized by Chair E. C. Quist, Esq. *West Africa Times*, April 13, 1931, 1.

⁴⁵² A teacher or clerk salary was unlikely to support the Rodger Club’s membership fee. In 1931, it was reported to be two shillings and six pennies a month, a penny a day. Editorial, “Why Clubs and Societies in Accra Never Last Long?” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 9, 1931. For comparison, a dance ticket for men was as much as five shillings. The exact salary of a clerk is unknown. Stephan Miescher provides the following information: in 1937 a standard VII graduate’s starting clerk salary was one pound per month,

In the original article published in the *Times* on June 27, 1931, “Zadig” suggested there were *three exclusive* “societies” in Accra: the African and European high government officials associated with Christiansborg Castle; “the exclusive white society” associated with the European-only Accra Club; and, the “exclusive African society” associated with the Rodger Club. He identified the people associated with these three societies as Accra’s “upper tenth.”⁴⁵³ Men who did not receive an invitation to the Rodger Club’s annual “At Home” were not part of the “upper tenth,” and, therefore, had not “yet arrived in society.” The “bohemians” formed another set that fell outside “Society” and were considered “leaders in fashionable life.”⁴⁵⁴

The term “upper ten” had been used by the *West African Reporter* in the 1870s to denote some of the “most prominent” men among professional West Africans and creoles, usually men educated in law and medicine in Britain.⁴⁵⁵ Its use in West Africa

which would increase by ten shillings on an annual basis for the first three years of employment. An African police worker earned four and a half pounds per month as a recruit (date unspecified) and as an officer he made five pounds and five shillings per month. Police officers made less than storekeepers, but their income was more stable. Salaries mercantile clerks fluctuated with the market and in the 1930s were particularly low. Cuts to teachers’ salaries were reported in the 1930s. Especially hard hit were the teachers at the non-government schools. Salaries were spent on items considered “essential” to the clerk class. They included European clothing, hats, shoes, toiletries, writing paper, books, newspapers, and furniture. These items signified class status and many young clerks used the majority of their salaries to acquire these items. The figures offered by Miescher are based on interviews with men from the clerk class. Most of the information did not specify income year. Most of the information likely pertains to the late 1930s and early 1940s. The depression of the 1930s also impacted the lives of the clerks, and many were reported to be unemployed or underpaid. Provided their economic situation and the expenses associated with their class status, it is unlikely that many men from this group could have afforded to pay the Rodger Club fee, if only a penny per month. Stephan Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 87, 95-7, 108.

⁴⁵³ He added that European men who were not members of the Accra Club or the Western Ridge Sports Club were not part of either European society. “Diary of a man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, June 27, 1931, 2.

⁴⁵⁴ The “bohemian set” is undefined. “Bohemians” are mentioned in the play *A Woman in Jade* which was published by the *Times* in 1934 under the penname Marjorie Mensah. In the play, the bohemians appear as a distinct group of “Society” that spent their leisure time at popular bars and participated in a life of drink and frivolity. For a transcript of the play see *Selected Writings of a Pioneer West African Feminist*, ed. Stephanie Newell and Audrey Gadzekpo (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004).

⁴⁵⁵ Adelaide M. Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford, 1868-1960* (London: F. Cass, 1986), 11.

probably originates from England where it was applied to the landed and titled classes. In 1877, London publisher Kelly and Company issued its third annual edition of *The Upper Ten Thousand. A Handbook of the Titled and Official Classes*.⁴⁵⁶ The handbook includes members of the aristocracy, titled persons, Members of Parliament, and men of the “higher grades of the legal, military, navel, clerical, or colonial services of the State,” along with Governors of the “Indian Empire,” “Dominion of Canada,” and the “Colonies and Dependencies.”⁴⁵⁷ The image of the “upper ten” that formed on the pages of the *Times* during the early 1930s closely resembles Kristin Mann’s and Adelaide Cromwell’s descriptions of elite society in Lagos and Freetown at the turn of the 19th century. It is likely that the *Times*’s portrayal of their group was a recreation of the elite culture of an earlier generation of Cape Coast, Freetown and Lagos elites.

As “Zadig’s” column stated so clearly, a man’s entrance into exclusive African society” required more than the ability to read and write in English or knowledge of classic literary and philosophical texts. It demanded an advanced degree, experience and knowledge associated with having been to England and other countries outside West Africa, “good character” (that members of this “Society” were attempting to define in their press), wealth and/or status from family or occupation, and an educated woman as helpmate and life-long companion. British educated West Africans had political, social, familial, and economic ties to prominent African chiefs, high European officials, and

⁴⁵⁶ It is possible, though unlikely that the *Times*’s use of the term was influenced by W. E. B. Du Bois’ discussion of the “Talented Tenth” in 1903. For Du Bois, the term formed part of his larger proposal for education as a means of social change among African Americans, and not as a means of identifying a “select” class of people. W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” in *The Negro Problem* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

⁴⁵⁷ It also included a list of the metropolitan and imperial clubs in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin. Among the list of clubs were the “Cocoa Tree,” “East India United Service,” “Cosmopolitan,” “Oriental,” and “Travellers’.” *The Upper Ten Thousand. A Handbook of the Titled and Official Classes* (London: Kelly and Company, 1877), v, 652, 660-1.

African students and intellectuals living abroad and in other parts of West Africa. It was also common for British educated men and women from Lagos, Freetown, Cape Coast, Bathurst and Accra to inter-marry, facilitating the formation of a dense network of social and professional connections.⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, this group's education and travels abroad enhanced their social status. For example, news of Mr. F. Awooner Williams, a Gold Coast barrister and President of the African Academy, participation in an international conference on African children in London made the front page of the *Times*.⁴⁵⁹ Men and women also drew on their connections to elites in other colonies, particularly elites in Freetown and Lagos.

"Zadig's" discussion of social class provoked response. Readers suggested that his definition of society was too narrow. "Zadig" responded by revising his definition to include all members of the educated community in society, though he remained committed to his original assessment of an exclusive African "Society" associated with the Rodger Club and an exclusive European society "recognized at the Castle" within literate society. Thus, readers outside these two groups were part of literate society.⁴⁶⁰ This revised definition acknowledged the presence of an educated group beyond the Rodger Club, while his identification of two exclusive classes at the Castle and Rodger Club further positioned the educated elite as "superior" to locally-educated readers and equal to members of European society.

"Zadig's" discussion of Castle and Rodger Club societies was reinforced by the *Times's* column "The Castle and Society," a daily record of the comings and goings of

⁴⁵⁸ Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist*.

⁴⁵⁹ "Conference on African Children," *West Africa Times*, April 30, 1931, 1.

⁴⁶⁰ "Diary of a Man About Town," *West Africa Times*, October 27, 1931, 2.

men and women associated with both groups, their travel plans, achievements, weddings, club meetings, and other social events. “Zadig’s” definition and the column showed the two groups as separate, though at the same time connected. The content of the column suggests that the social and political lives of elite Africans and high European officials frequently intersected. The Governor of the Gold Coast gave addresses to the Rodger Club and members of the club occupied seats on the Legislative Council. Events deemed “Society” affairs in the paper usually included men and women associated with both groups. Elite Africans attended Castle events and European officials were listed as guests of African sponsored events. The paper reported that the Acting Governor of the Gold Coast attended a dance the Palladium hosted by the YACCAS Club, joining Accra’s “bright young set.”⁴⁶¹ In the summer of 1931, Europeans and Rodger Club men and women organized a cabaret show.⁴⁶² The Governor’s wife, Lady Slater, founded a women’s club that included promising young African school teachers and headmistresses. In her preparations for the Gold Coast’s first Military Tattoo, “Marjorie Mensah” reported having taken great care in choosing her dress “because . . . society will be there in full fledge . . . in all its regalia and finery,” including possibly Lady Slater and the Governor.⁴⁶³ As these examples suggest, the social and political affairs of both

⁴⁶¹ Miss Edwards, “Brilliant Dance at the Palladium, the YACCAS Club,” *West Africa Times*, April 7, 1931, 4. “Marjorie” provided a romantic description of the dance in her column, proclaiming she had never seen the Palladium look so wonderful, and swooned over the “slender feminine figures of hearty bewitchingly robed in the new mode—with long Victorian skirts which fell in graceful folds just tipping the ankle.” At the end of her dramatic recount of the evening, she wrote, “We are, truly, the spoilt darlings of civilization.” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 8, 1931, 2.

⁴⁶² The paper announced that Governor and Lady Slater would be present at the Cabaret performance at the Rodger Club. “The Castle and Society,” *West Africa Times*, July 1, 1931, 2.

⁴⁶³ She reported having seen bus loads of people all “hastening to the Race Course to witness the historic display” of soldiers in “full kit marching into action with their rifle and other accoutrements”—a Military Tattoo, which she wrote, “no one would have expected . . . on the Gold Coast today. But it has come to pass.” The Tattoo was a sign of progress in the country, proving “we out here are daily building,” and can no longer be considered in “the ‘back of things’” and hardly fit for a good white man—never mind tender

groups overlapped. Bringing these two groups closer together while also distinguishing them as separate segments of Accra's political and social world in the public imagination was "The Castle and Society."

Helping "Zadig" shape his definition of "Society" was "Marjorie Mensah," a penname used by several writers for the paper's women's column. "Zadig" focused on the political and economic affairs of the city and country, offering men's opinions on the "male" issues surrounding employment, government, colonialism, imperialism, and economics, while "Marjorie" focused on "women's" issues, fashion, domesticity, and society, and "social reform" related to women's/girl's education and employment, and gender relationships. According to "Zadig," "Marjorie" belonged to the "bright young set"; not only did she produce a smart and "newsy" column, but she also knew who was "in" and "out" of Accra "Society."⁴⁶⁴ If anyone should know who belonged to "Society," "Zadig" argued it was "Marjorie Mensah" who also edited the paper's column "The Castle and Society." "Marjorie" told "Zadig" that "[t]he constitution of society is the constitution of my column 'The Castle and Society.' He whom I put there belongs, and she whom I don't doesn't."⁴⁶⁵ "Zadig" made frequent references to "Marjorie's" column, always in a way that indicated to readers that "Marjorie," as the educated woman, was responsible for certain aspects of social life and manners.

Through the interactions between these columns, the men's and women's columns and the society column ("Castle and Society"), the Times configured the social

girls in their teens," but the Military Tattoo proves that this has all come to pass and the Gold Coast as progressed. "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, July 1, 1931, 2.

⁴⁶⁴ "Zadig," "Diary of a Man About Town," *West Africa Times*, March 24, 1931, 2.

⁴⁶⁵ "Zadig," "Diary of a Man About Town," *West Africa Times*, July 13, 1931, 2. For another reference to "Marjorie" and "Society" see "Zadig's" column published March 14-15, 1931, 2.

and intellectual life of the colony along gendered lines in ways that consolidated elite identity and served their class interest. Through their exchanges, “Marjorie” and “Zadig” defined elite society and also the larger urban social body, constructing a new economy of gender and gender relations and rules for elevating one’s social status within the educated community. The interactions between these sections of the paper helped determine insider and outsider status among the educated group; which was, in turn, part of the educated elites’ project to increase their authority over the public sphere and, thus, the nation that was constructed within it.

Events hosted by the Rodger Club, as well as the Ladies Section of the NCBWA, and the Ladies Musical Society were written up in the paper and included the names of important guests, in addition to descriptions of the general atmosphere, and details about women’s evening wear, winners of dance competitions, and the time the event ended. For example, a report on a dance at the Rodger Club that was hosted by the Ladies’ Musical Society was described as exclusive and only for “the very select few in Accra.” Important guests included African men and women from wealthy and established coastal families such as Mrs. William Wood, Miss Phyllis Ribeiro, Mrs. Galdys Plange, Miss Mabel Dove, Mr. E. C. Quist, Mr. Sawyer, Hon. J. G. Christian (of Sekondi), Mr. Frans Dove, Mrs. Van Hein, Mrs. Hansen Sackey and Mrs. Baffoe.⁴⁶⁶

The inclusion of guest lists, or the names of certain guests, further defined the world of exclusive African “Society.” A report on a house party sponsored by Mr. S. Quao Sackey and his friends Albert Howard-Mills, C. J. Buckle, Q. L. Crabbe, and Nee

⁴⁶⁶ The Police Band, a local music band, played music and members of the Ladies’ Musical Society offered solo performances at this event. The paper reported that the evening was long, lasting until two o’clock in the morning. *West Africa Times*, May 9, 1931.

Owoo, listed the following “prominent guests”: the Ribeiro sisters, Victoria Van-Hein, Flora Vanderpuye, Adjo-Pappoe, J. Manyo Plange, Kate Mensah, Miss Ivy Howard-Mills, Duncan Bruce, S. David Pappoe, Robert Bannerman, and W. E. Wood.⁴⁶⁷ A “very select audience” was reported to have attended Mrs. Quarshie-Idun’s lecture on “Domestic Training as a necessity for the Africa Girl” at the Young People’s Literary Club on April 11, 1933. Miss Whittaker was in the Chair, and guests who spoke in appreciation of Mrs. Quarshie-Idun’s lecture included Mr. Ward (the only European member of the Young People’s Literary Club),⁴⁶⁸ Mr. G. F. Hood, Miss Papafio, Mr. Peters and Mr. Quarshie-Idun. “Among some of the persons of note present were: Mr. Ateko, Miss Cook, Mrs. Solomon-Odamtten, Mr. Joseph Whittaker, Miss Florence Christian and many other people prominent in the community.”⁴⁶⁹ Other names that frequently made the paper’s A-list included “jurist and patriot” John Mensah Sarbah,⁴⁷⁰ de Graft Johnson,⁴⁷¹ Dr. F. V. Nanka-Bruce, J. B. Danquah, Mabel and Marion Dove, Samuel Bannerman,⁴⁷² and Miss Esther Stonewall Payne.⁴⁷³ Most of these women and men were highly-educated, with degrees from elite finishing schools and universities in

⁴⁶⁷ *West Africa Times*, May 29, 1931.

⁴⁶⁸ “Mr. & Mrs. Ward Entertain Accra Youngsters, Simplicity and Economics at Achimota,” *Times of West Africa*, April 19, 1933, 1. The paper identifies Mr. Ward as “the only European member of the Literary Club,” and as a person “whose interest in, and love for, the African is exemplary.”

⁴⁶⁹ “Another Woman Occupies Platform,” *Times of West Africa*, April 19, 1933, 1.

⁴⁷⁰ The paper announced the Optimist Literary Club’s Patron day, June 3, 1931, the birthday of Sarbah who would turn 67 that year. The chairs of the meeting were the Bishop of Accra and Dr. F. V. Nanka Bruce.

⁴⁷¹ de Graft Johnson was scheduled to speak on May 30, 1931 at the anniversary of the Young People’s Literary Club.

⁴⁷² Mr. Samuel Bannerman was employed as the Divisional Court Registrar. He hosted an “At Home” reception for Mr. S. G. Watson who would soon be transferred after receiving a promotion to Chief Clerkship of the Political Department. “Reception to Mr Watson,” *Gold Coast Independent*, November 28, 1931, 1519. Bannerman is a well-known elite coastal family name.

⁴⁷³ Stonewall Payne sent a letter to the *West Africa Times* in defense of “Marjorie’s” identity as a woman writer in 1931. A year and a half later, “Marjorie” offered Stonewall Payne congratulations on her engagement to Mr. Bannerman (from elite coastal family). “Marjorie” also praised Stonewall Payne for her achievement as one of the first “girls” to enter the Civil Service. “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, January 26, 1933, 2.

England. They came from established and educated coastal families, and were, according to the *Times*, prominent members of “Society.”

The announcement and description of weddings was another way of defining exclusive African “Society.” Several “Society” weddings made the front page of the *Times*. The marriage of Miss Dorothy Lamiley Vanderpuye and Mr. William Edujae Wood provoked the front page headline: “Brilliant Society Wedding Union of Two Great Families.” Their wedding took place at the Holy Trinity Church followed by a “big reception” held at the Palladium and hosted by the uncle of the bridegroom, the Honourable J. Glover Addo.⁴⁷⁴ The bride was given away by her paternal uncle Mr. K. Quartey-Papafio, B.L.⁴⁷⁵ Another front page wedding was the “Splendid and Unique Wedding” of Miss Marion Adeline Dove, daughter of Francis Dove, “the distinguished lawyer,” and Mr. Solomon Edmund Odamtten that took place on May 21, 1931 at the Holy Trinity Church followed by a wedding party at the Rodger Club. The bridesmaids were Phyllis and Irene Ribeiro, and “[m]any European employees of United Africa Co., Mr. Odamtten’s business friends, attended the wedding. Among prominent people who attended was Nii Kojo, Ababio IV. the Mantse of James Town.” Over 500 guests of the bride and groom were present at the reception, and over “eighty cars” were parked on the “spacious grounds in front of Rodger Club.” The popular local band, the Police Band, “rendered fine music at the Club.”⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ “Brilliant Society Wedding Union of Two Great Families,” *West Africa Times*, May 7, 1931, 1. “Big reception” is the description provided by a writer for the *Gold Coast Independent*. “Wedding Bells Wood-Vanderpuye,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 9, 1931, 591.

⁴⁷⁵ “Wedding Bells Wood-Vanderpuye,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 9, 1931, 591.

⁴⁷⁶ “Splendid and Unique Wedding, Bridal Gown without Train,” *West Africa Times*, May 22, 1931, 1.

Another high society wedding appeared on the front page of the paper April 18, 1933 announcing the marriage of Miss Mary Asafu Adajye and the son of Nana E. Agyeman, Prempeh I, Reverend Father John H. Prempeh, at St. Cyprian's Church in Kumasi. This is the only wedding announced on the front page that had direct ties to prominent African chiefs on the side of the bride and groom. The bride was the niece of a chief in Kumasi who was also a member of the Gold Coast Board of Education, and younger sister of E. O. Asafu-Adjaye, a barrister in Kumasi and Accra.⁴⁷⁷ This particular wedding shows chiefs as part of "Society," though the marriages of most African chiefs did not make the front page news. It is likely that this wedding made the front page because E. O. Asafu-Adjaye's professional standing in Accra. Thus, according to the *Times* and as presented through wedding announcements, Accra "Society" was mainly composed of young and highly-educated African professionals.

The practice of announcing "Society" weddings on the front page continued throughout the life of the paper, though the weddings described in the paper were more subdued than those that appeared during the paper's first year. On April 19, 1933, the *Times of West Africa* announced the "Wedding of a Popular Girl," Miss Phyllis Ribeiro ("niece of Mr. and Mrs. H. F. Ribeiro") to Dr. Savage of Lagos ("brother of Dr. Savage of Achimota, and son of famous doctor of that name who lived in Cape Coast"). The ceremony, as with so many other "Society" weddings, took place at the Holy Trinity Church, and was said to have attracted a "very select" crowd. Guests included "Rev. and Mrs. Fraser and others from Achimota, and professional men and their wives, a few Europeans and Indians." The *Times* praised the wedding for its simplicity, claiming it

⁴⁷⁷ "High Society Wedding at Kumasi," *Times of West Africa*, April 18, 1933, 1.

lacked “that usual vulgarity of pomp and show characteristic of many weddings in Accra.”⁴⁷⁸

The paper’s preference for simple weddings might be due to the economic difficulties of the decade, but also to a shift in this group’s representations of class. J. B. Danquah and Mabel Dove’s wedding went beyond simple. Like other members of their group, they married at the Holy Trinity Church, but it was a “quite wedding ceremony” to which very few people were invited. In fact, the paper noted, “even the closest friends of the bridegroom were not aware of it.” The wedding was scheduled into the busy schedule of Dr. Danquah who was said to have arrived at the wedding ceremony “straight from the Palladium soon after” having delivered an address at the Optimist Literary club anniversary meeting.⁴⁷⁹ Details on select weddings displayed a certain section of Accra, placed in relationship to front page headlines about international conferences for African children to be held in London,⁴⁸⁰ announcements for Empire Day celebrations,⁴⁸¹ an announcement of the King’s birthday parade to be held at the polo grounds in Accra,⁴⁸² news of Gandhi’s meeting with the Indian Roundtable in London, and his sailing in a loim

⁴⁷⁸ “Wedding of a Popular Girl,” *Times of West Africa*, April 19, 1933, 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Like many other elite couples, they were married by Father E. J. Martinson at the Holy Trinity Church. Guests were mainly family and close friends. They included Mr. William Ofori Atta, Mr. Aaron Ofori Atta, Miss Susana B. Ofori Atta, Miss Vincentis Kwawukume, Mr. Bonso Bruce, Mr. C. E. Clerk, Mr. Oliver Dove, “and a few [unnamed] friends.” Dove’s uncle, Mr. Bonso Bruce, gave her away. “A Quiet Wedding Ceremony, Dr. Danquah and Miss Dove,” *West Africa Times*, September 7, 1933, 1. The wedding was also announced in the *Gold Coast Independent* (in the “Gold Coast Week by Week section of the paper) on September 9, 1933, 850.

⁴⁸⁰ *West Africa Times*, April 30, 1931, 1. News on the conference later appeared in the paper. The article was borrowed from a Sierra Leone paper. *West African Times*, May 5, 1931.

⁴⁸¹ *West Africa Times*, May 26, 1931, 1. “Marjorie Mensah” also includes a discussion of preparation for school children, special dresses for the occasion are said to be expensive for parents. “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, May 24, 1931, 2.

⁴⁸² *West Africa Times*, June 4, 1931, 1.

cloth,⁴⁸³ an article on the “African Traveler, A real Cosmopolitan,”⁴⁸⁴ an article by a woman Member of Parliament on race discrimination in the hotel industry in England,⁴⁸⁵ and articles on the “Musical Talent of our Women” along with reports of public lectures given by women.⁴⁸⁶

The paper also covered the weddings of high European officials, in a way that demonstrated this group’s difference from and connection to the society of high officials and affluent and prominent Europeans in the colony. Of the most celebrated of weddings of the early 1930s was the Slater-Fougler wedding. Announcements and descriptions of this wedding were carried in all the local papers. “Marjorie” devoted four issues of her column to the wedding.⁴⁸⁷ The marriage ceremony was performed at the Holy Trinity Church followed by a large and elaborate reception at Christiansborg Castle hosted by the Governor. Performances by the local Girl Guides and a troop of Boy Scouts and Cubs (led by Mr. Odamtten) were part of the wedding party. The *Gold Coast Independent* published a list of “invited” guests from the “African community” that included prominent lawyers and other educated professionals along with African chiefs.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸³ *West Africa Times*, June 5, 1931, 1. The paper reprinted a news article on Gandhi’s sailing in a loin cloth from Reuter’s news service. September 7, 1931, 1.

⁴⁸⁴ *West Africa Times*, July 14, 1931, 1.

⁴⁸⁵ Miss Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., “Coloured Guests in English Hotels,” *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 1.

⁴⁸⁶ “Musical Talent of our Women,” *West Africa Times*, October 26, 1931, 1.

⁴⁸⁷ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies Corner,” *West Africa Times*, October 12, 13-14, 17, and 20, 1931.

⁴⁸⁸ Included in the list were: Nana Sir Ofori Atta, Nana Sir Emmanuel Mate Kole, Nee Kojo Ababio IV, James Town Manche, Omanhene of Winneba, Mr. and Mrs. Woolhouse Bannerman, Mr. and Mrs. Buckle, Mr. and Mrs. Coussey, Mrs. B. L. Auchod, Mr. and Mrs. J. Buckman, Mr. and Mrs. Nanka-Bruce, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Dove, Mr. and Mrs. Glover Addo, Mr. and Mrs. H. L. Hesse Odamtten, Mr. S. L. Hyde, Mr. and Mrs. J. C. de Graft Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Kitson Mills, Mr. H. H. Malm, Revd. and Mrs. Martinson, Mr. R. Okne, Mr. E. N. Owoo, Miss Ruby Quartey Papafio, Mr. and Mrs. E. C. Quist, Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Reindorf, Captain P. A. Renner, Mr. and Mrs. Ribeiro, Miss Savage, Mr. and Mrs. Akilagpa Sawyer, The Fia of Awuna, Miss Margaret Sonne, Mr. J. Welsing, Miss V. Grant (of the first Accra Company Girl Guides). European guests were identified separately and included Captain N. S. Mansergh M.B.E. of the Gold Coast Police as the bestman, and “Chief Justice and Lady Deane, the Honorable Mrs. G. A. Northcote and party, and the heads of Departments and the heads of some of the Mercantile houses.” “The Governor’s Daughter Married,” *Gold Coast Independent*, October 17, 1931, 1130; *Gold Coast*

The inclusion of African guests by name, self-consciously linked newspaper writers and certain members of the African community (in this case African chiefs, wealthy businessmen, and highly-educated professionals) with European high officials, while at the same time denoting the independence and importance of the exclusive African “Society” of Accra. Supporting this is “Zadig’s” use of the list of guests as evidence of those included in Castle society. After discussing the two exclusive societies in Accra, the Rodger Club and the Castle, he wrote: “The publication of the list of invitees to the Slater-Foulger wedding defines clearly for us who constitute society at the Castle.”⁴⁸⁹ Provided the guest list, which included Rodger Club members alongside high government officials and prominent African chiefs and business owners, these “two” societies saw many overlaps between them. “Zadig” maintained, however, that these societies were separate, but connected, again, drawing attention to the connection between highly-educated men associated with the Rodger Club and high government officials associated with the Castle.

“All other social groups” and Society

Locally-educated Africans, or as “Zadig” put it, the “Tom, Dick, and Harry” of Accra’s literary scene, entered the public sphere as a non-descript group of readers that

Independent, October 17, 1931, 1330; “The Fougler-Slater Wedding Full Details of the Ceremony,” by “A Special Correspondent,” *Gold Coast Independent*, October 24, 1931, 1369-71. One of the original goals of this project was to identify by name the people included in the events and social engagements, especially the so-called “Society” affairs in order to know the names and biographies of the people that formed part of the “elite.”

⁴⁸⁹ “Zadig,” “Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, October 27, 1931, 2.

was part of literate society, but was not part of Accra's exclusive African "Society" associated with the Rodger Club. While not the focus of the paper's discussion, this group of middling readers occupied an essential role in the social and political imagination of the highly-educated group—as an internal other, that is, as a source of difference and self-definition; and, as future citizens of the nation to be guided by the educated elite. Newspaper writers needed the locally-educated group to buy their papers and to participate in the creation of an alternative political space, to build an educated West African "public opinion" and presence within colonial, imperial, and international social and political arenas of discussion and exchange. Writers for the *Times* and other local papers constructed these readers as the young and hopeful future of Africa that they claimed to protect and nurture. Their discourse on locally-educated young men would change over the course of the decade, with newspaper writers' declaring the educated masses the hopeful "Africa of tomorrow," and as themselves "Renascent Africans who existed in 'a transitional stage between the Old and the New.'"⁴⁹⁰ Youth would become a key phrase associated the Gold Coast Youth Conference of 1930 and 1938, and Nnamdi Azikiwe's "New Africa" and I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson's West African Youth Movement.

An editorial entitled "A Nation in Travail" published in the *Times* on January 26, 1933 offers an early representation of "youth" and the nation. In this editorial, the writer, possibly J. B. Danquah, critiqued the colonial government's proposal for reducing the number of positions for African clerks in the Civil Service for a period of five years in order "to avoid an abnormal increase in the pensions bill," which the writer learned about at the Rodger Club, where the Governor had presented an address on the issue earlier that

⁴⁹⁰ Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 116-24.

week. Here we see the Rodger Club functioning as an informal political space, perhaps an extension of the Legislative Council, in which high government officials gave addresses on political issues and policies to highly-educated and affluent members of African “Society,” and gathered information that they then used to lobby the government in their press.

The editorial’s positioning of elite educated African in relation to the colonial government and low-level African clerks on the issue of pensions (the future) is especially telling. The editor accused the government of cheating Africa’s future in their attempt to secure the cheapest way to avoid increases in the pension bill. The government’s plan was to retrench low-level clerks. This group of “so-called ‘cheap’ clerks” were, according to the editor, the “country’s future trustees” the colonial government was willing to sacrifice for a temporary solution to their budgetary problems. The government’s lack of foresight and tendency to “look only to its tenure of five or six years” had placed the “people” in the “unfortunate position of having to think, not merely in terms of years, from one April to another April,” but “in terms of lives, from one life to another, from one generation of young hopefuls to another generation of the country’s future trustees.” The country’s well-being would be determined by the future of these young clerks and was the paper’s greatest concern. If these young men were to be “sacrificed for the country’s immediate needs,” the Gold Coast, ten or twenty years into the future will be “a country lacking in virility, without leaders, without virile youth,” a dreadful prospect to the editor of the *Times*, as it should be to anyone proclaiming to be “the nationalist . . . the true patriot.”

Using this group as a springboard from which to articulate their own position vis-à-vis the colonial government, the editorial suggested that they, members of African “Society,” were more invested in the future welfare of the county than the colonial government. In this scenario, the young men were presented as a promising future at risk given the colonial government’s short sightedness. Those best able to save these young men were the well-connected and patronizing educated elite. They had the power to speak on behalf of young men and hence for Africa’s future. They owned the press and had access to access informal political discussions through their membership in the Rodger Club. They alone were capable of safe-guarding, nurturing, and ultimately launching young men, and, in turn, young Africa into the “future.” The young men become critical to the highly-educated group in their own efforts to position themselves not only as equal to the colonial government, but as better suited than this group to lead Africa into a new age. Highly-educated Africans, the editorial suggested, saw far beyond the colonial administration in terms of their vision of the future welfare of the country and its people. By focusing on the youth and its future welfare, the highly-educated group turned the spotlight away from their own desires for a voice in the political affairs of the country, suggesting instead their concerns were motivated by their investment in the greater good of the people.

In their construction of themselves as guardians of youth, the future of Africa, these educated elite positioned themselves as transcendent yet liminal figures, qualified by their cosmopolitan education and superior political and social connections to guide young Africa and young Africans into the future. Guidance laced through with patronizing condescension characterized this discourse. As the elite (so socially and

politically dominant and visible) represented itself almost as active ghosts passing through the present, working towards the future. This self presentation contrasted sharply to the elites' representation of their two principle rivals for authority and power—the British and the African chiefs. The British, as depicted on the pages of the *Times* and other papers, were not invested in the future. Just the contrary, it was the past that obsessed them, as seen in their construction of “tribal authority” and “traditional Africa” motivated by shortsighted capitalist self-interest. The chiefs likewise eschewed the future. Their power and authority relied too heavily upon the British through indirect rule, and their fragmented leadership and ethnic identifications had no place in a post World War I world of unified governments and nations. The path towards the future saw the self-celebrating elite inhabiting both roles—the role of chiefs (by strategically leaving omitting them from the discussion) and the British colonial officials, “the Castle.” By appropriating and fusing these two roles (and political structures), they rivaled colonial Africa and became themselves a representation “modernity” in the region.

Despite their claims of authority and leadership over the locally-educated group, elite Africans needed them to represent an educated and elaborate West African public sphere to the British. But at the same time, they were threatened by this group's growing visibility and presence in the city. Less positive images of locally-educated men circulated in other parts of the paper, especially in the men's and women's columns. Writers for the women's column made fun of the habits and flowery literary style of the “local classes” and criticized them for an alleged lack of interest in literature and education. They accused them of spending too much time and money on dancing and clothes. A writer for the *Gold Coast Independent* was as equally critical of young men,

arguing that they formed clubs on the basis of a fleeting interest or loose affiliation, joined several at once, rarely attended clubs meetings, and failed to pay membership dues.⁴⁹¹

If these young locally-educated men were to be the citizens of their vision of a future West African nation, elite newspaper writers expected them to be prudent in their financial affairs and more discriminating in their social lives. The educated elite encouraged locally-educated readers to “mimic” elite behavior similar to how Homi Bhabha describes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized; the educated elite hoped for locally-educated readers’ emulation of them, but in such a way that the locally-educated group would never surpass or replace the elite group.⁴⁹² Though, unlike colonizing discourses associated with indirect rule that depicted Africa as entirely “Other” to Britain, the elite constructed grammar school graduates as capable of being contributors to the nation. In fact, they were to be the citizens of a West African nation. The elite approached middling readers as an opportunity, for what they could become. Over the course of the decade, they came to play an increasingly important role in the political and cultural agenda of the educated elite, eventually representing the hopeful youth of a new nation, the delicate embryo of Africa’s future, of what Africa could become under elite leadership.

⁴⁹¹ “Why Clubs and Societies In Accra Never Last Long?” Editorial, *Gold Coast Independent*, May 9, 1931. There were exceptions, of course, and it is difficult to know if the editorials and articles on clubs were accurate accounts of the situation. Government records do, however, confirm a high turnover of clubs during the thirties. Stephanie Newell finds that the interwar period witnessed a high turn over of clubs.

⁴⁹² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 89.

Chiefs and Society

Where do African chiefs fit into the *Times's* discussion of exclusive Accra “Society” and their vision for a new nation? Chiefs are nearly absent from “Zadig’s” and “Marjorie’s” discussion of society, though some appear in the list of names at “Society” affairs. Those listed held high positions in the native administration, and usually occupied one of the six seats for African chiefs on the Legislative Council. These powerful figures within the chieftaincy socialized with Castle and Rodger Club society, but were not members of either group, nor did they form their own section of literary society. They figured instead as friends of Castle and Society, and also as relatives and supporters of “Society.”

As with “Zadig’s” description of Accra society, chiefs remain curiously absent from the discussion of the social life of educated Africans and their vision of nationhood. The critical absence of chiefs from these discussions suggests either their irrelevance to the elites’ political project, or the assumption that the future of Africa included the native administration. It could be argued that the *Times's* political project was not about replacing the dual mandate system entirely, but aimed for a post-colonial nation in which western-educated Africans replaced the British colonial authority as one arm of government alongside a native administration. The paper’s editor, J. B. Danquah had close personal and political ties to the African chieftaincy. Sir Nana Ofori Atta, his brother, was the Omanhene of Akim Abuakwa and occupied one of the six seats for African chiefs on the Legislative Council. However, I believe that the primary political project of WASU in London and the *Times* in Accra was not simply for the educated elite to replace British colonials; rather it was to see the end of the dual mandate system and in

its place a unitary nation governed by the educated elite and an educated citizenry backed (but not led) by African chiefs.

The Gold Coast Youth Conference of 1930 and 1938 led by J. B. Danquah and other university-educated professionals offers additional insight into the role of chiefs for this particular group. Members of the Conference's planning committee and list of speakers were part of Accra "Society," including prominent Gold Coast lawyers J. Kitson Mills, Esq., Asuana Quartey, Esq., and Therson Cofie, Esq. and other elite West Africans Dr. J. W. de Graft Johnson and Miss Ruby Quartey Papafio. Prominent African chiefs Dr. F. V. Nanka-Bruce and Hon. Nana Sir Ofori Atta were active members of the Conference. The Conference, which was initiated by the educated elite, sought to bring various segments of Accra's literary society together along with the leaders of the African chieftaincy to discuss common issues and concerns that affected the welfare of the country and its future nationhood. The literary society consisted of the educated elite and several literary and social clubs representing middling readers. Both meetings focused on the identification of the "essential" steps for progress and development in the Gold Coast.

While African chiefs were involved in both conferences, the educated elite formed the majority of speakers, and more critically, dominated the planning committee. Some chiefs gave addresses, but most appeared as "patrons" of the conferences. The meaning of patron is somewhat ambiguous in this particular context and probably references both African notions of patronage and this cohort of educated elites' revised understanding of the relationship. In this instance (and also in the case of WASU patrons), patrons were not directly involved in the planning or management of the

conferences. Rather, they supported and thus “authorized” the meetings, enhancing their credibility among Africans and Europeans. This particular arrangement between the educated elite and chiefs suggests the kind of relationship members of the elite hoped to cultivate with the chiefs in their vision for the nation.

This relationship between chiefs and the educated elite is further articulated through the “National Fund” that grew out of the 1938 conference. The Fund worked to establish a general set of standards for marriage and inheritance that blended European and African norms and would encompass all ethnic groups. The National Fund involved the educated elite and chiefs collaboration in the creation of “one common Gold Coast-Ashanti ‘national’ instrument” invested with the power to oversee developments in education, health and social hygiene, trade and commerce, marriage, and inheritance.⁴⁹³ The Fund included the creation of African history and culture, and changes to the marriage and inheritance customs in the country that would promote common standards and practices throughout the Gold Coast and across different ethnic groups. The Fund did not demand the complete removal of the Native Administration, but it also did not imagine the educated elite as simply moving into the position of British colonials. It proposed a singular governmental structure to replace the colonial governmental structure that divided West Africa between a so-called “modern” British administration and a so-called “traditional” chieftaincy.

The historical specificity of the Fund require further examination; however, what is most relevant to understanding the *Times*’s vision of a future Africa in the early 1930s is the Fund’s call for a unitary instrument of government that sought to combat the

⁴⁹³ The Youth Conference, *First Steps towards a National Fund* (Accra, Ghana: The Continuation Committee, Gold Coast Youth Conference, 1938), 4.

modern/traditional and urban/rural dichotomies embedded in the colonial governmental structure of indirect rule. The Fund suggests that the primary obstacles in the path of the educated elites' political project were these dichotomies and not the African chieftaincy. The elite sought the assistance of African chiefs to encourage the standardization of laws and customs for all Gold Coast and Ashanti people, thus suturing ethnic divisions within the native administration and dissolving the colonial construction of "modern" (British) and "traditional" ("native") Africa to see the creation of a unitary West African nation.

Women and Accra Society

Women played a significant role in creating the new Africa and "Society," both as participants in its construction and as symbols of difference between different classes and groups within Accra. Constructions of gender and sexuality in the press, often expressed through discussions of womanhood, became the primary means through which difference and power relations within the English-literate group were expressed. Women's varied and numerous appearances in all sections of the paper attest to their importance to the process of ascribing class difference. The presence of elite educated women in the public sphere helped elite African men define their status against the locally-educated.

Women as writers and as a topic of discussion appeared on virtually every page of the new urban press of the 1930s and came to represent West Africa's potential for self-government. A visible population of educated women to serve as companions to educated men and to participate as citizens in a post-colonial nation was evidence of West Africa's being "modern," or as some readers put it, "abreast" with the times, in the

sense that West African men recognized the value of women's education and participation in social and political life. Educated woman (fictive and real), as explored at length in the following chapter, had a critical role to play in the educated elites' efforts to decolonize West Africa. Women were at the heart of elite visions for a post-colonial nation and "New Age."⁴⁹⁴

The *Times* went to great lengths to spotlight the few highly-educated women in Accra by announcing elite women's lectures on the front page. The paper also provided positive reviews of women's events, usually in the women's and men's columns.⁴⁹⁵

Women's club events also made front page news, especially those sponsored by the elite Ladies' Musical Society and the Ladies' Section of the National Congress of British West Africa. In these articles, men proudly discussed educated women's activities and achievements, referring to them as "our" women and encouraged other women to take a similar interest in social life. "Marjorie Mensah," as an idealized educated African woman invented by the *Times*, is an example of the elites' creation and development of a "woman's presence" in the press.

As the family biographies of bride and groom printed in wedding announcements suggest, women's inclusion in "Society" largely depended on her husband's and/or father's social status. Other factors, such as educational training, etiquette, dress, reputation, and behavior served to further determine women's social standing. Non-elite women were more likely than non-elite men to attend elite social functions, so long as they wore European dresses. We must note, however, that "Marjorie" disproved of such

⁴⁹⁴ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

⁴⁹⁵ An example of a lecture announcement which made front page news: "Another Woman Occupies Platform," a review of Mrs. Quarshie-Idun's lecture to the Young People's Literary Club on domestic training as a necessity for the African girl. *Times of West Africa*, April 19, 1933, 1.

inclusive practices. She argued that a number of “undesirable women” were “infiltrating” the “inner circles” of Accra and using elite gatherings to trade in prostitution. Women that indulged in “immoral” practices were not to be counted among the “upper set,” and in fact, posed a serious threat to Accra “Society” and African womanhood. She informed her readers that being “sufficiently dressed” or by having the “mere qualification of knowing how to read and write” was not “in itself adequate passport for social consideration and esteem”—appearance did not make a “lady.”⁴⁹⁶

“Marjorie Mensah” cautioned elite men against the practice of indiscriminately permitting “anything in frock” to attend “Society” affairs. A true “Society” affair included only the most “select” women in Accra. Describing a dance at the Villas, she observed that the dance was lively and well-attended, but it was not a “Society” affair. The “upper set” was absent, and the ladies who attended “were somewhat largely drawn from the other classes.”⁴⁹⁷ The presence or absence of certain women defined “Society” events, and, in this way, women came to demarcate the difference within the educated community. For this reason, “Marjorie” urged elite men to protect the integrity of “Society” and African womanhood by “weeding out of these malignant growths from the garden of our social life.” Such actions, she suggested, would protect African “Society” and encourage “esteem and tender regard for African womanhood.”⁴⁹⁸

The *Times*’s invention of “Marjorie Mensah” was part of the creation of elite status and the elites’ political and social role. “Marjorie’s” emphasis on social reform allowed the paper to locate social issues and concerns in the “field of the feminine

⁴⁹⁶ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies Corner,” *West Africa Times*, July 31-August 1, 1931, 2.

⁴⁹⁷ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 18 1931, 2.

⁴⁹⁸ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, May 6, 1931, 2.

world,” or “women’s sphere.”⁴⁹⁹ “Marjorie” worried about the education of women and the morality of men, both of which she made central to the production of a new Africa and its enhanced role in a changing British Empire. “Marjorie,” as she took form in the “Ladies’ Column” of the *Times* was a highly-educated African woman devoted to her country and to its many needs for social reform. She was a model to be followed by women of her class. Even more critically she signified elite educated men’s modernity for European and African audiences, reflecting their educated, urban world in Accra. “Marjorie” allowed male and female writers the opportunity to create a “feminine world” within the West African public sphere. A “women’s sphere” within the West African public sphere that was constructed by both elite men and women allowed both genders to “dress up” as their ideal educated African woman the better to order their burgeoning public sphere, which constituted the very core of their nationhood. They acted (and in the process created) the western-educated African woman and the role that she would play in their vision of the nation.

By showcasing educated women in their paper, and in the creation of a strong educated woman in “Marjorie Mensah,” the *Times* made an argument for West Africa’s “civilization” in response to European constructions of Africa as a “primitive” and “uncivilized” territory. The *Times*’s strategies for negating these discourses were at once anti-colonial and pro-women, at least in terms of their creating and promoting highly-educated, independent, and feminist women in the paper. In the case of “Marjorie,” not only was she a representation of an anti-colonial African womanhood, but she was also given a newspaper column in which she publically advocated for advancements in

⁴⁹⁹ Editorial, “Second Hand Women,” *Times of West Africa*, May 22, 1934, 2.

women's education, women's participation in the workforce, and involvement in social and political affairs. As discussed earlier, the women's columns by African men from the late 19th century actively encouraged African women to take inspiration from the women's suffrage movement in England. Likewise, "Marjorie" made references to the women's suffrage movement, and in one issue expressed her deep admiration of Emmeline Pankhurst.

However, "Marjorie" was different. She not only praised Pankhurst, she drew connections between certain aspects of the women's movement in England and Africans' struggle against colonialism and racism. "Marjorie's" creators were aware of the connection between educated women actively engaged in "public" affairs and a "modern" society made by the "New woman" writers of the late 19th and 20th centuries and in the popular press in England.⁵⁰⁰ An important assumption, therefore, underlined their construction of educated and "modern" womanhood in the Gold Coast—if "their" women were educated and modern, their "Society" and race would also have to be recognized (by Britain) similarly. And, if to be a society of educated citizens at this time was also to be a "civilized" society, why then was this particular society (of western-educated men) being denied the opportunity to lead the local population and their country into the "modern" world?

Western-educated, strong, and independent women giving lectures in the public sphere and writing for columns in the press were signs of this group's civilization for

⁵⁰⁰ The phrase "New woman" was coined with the publication of Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). New woman fiction is characterized by strong female figures as heroines who rebel against the limitations placed on their lives and demand same education and economic opportunities as men enjoy. Other examples include Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1889) and *Hedda Gabler* (1891). New woman writers also included male writers. Among them were Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, and George Gissing. Carolyn Christensen Nelson, *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001).

European audiences, but also a marker of their difference from locally-educated men and an expression of their authority over the educated community. As will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter, locally-educated men also used the press to present their own claims about gender and class. Through open spaces of the letters to the editor page, non-elite men submitted their own thoughts about masculinity and femininity, and provided rich information about their lives in the Accra. They also used their space to present their own vision of a new Africa and African manhood and womanhood.

Chapter 6

Constructing a Modern Nation in the “Ladies’ Corner”

In March 1931, the *West Africa Times* launched a new column addressed specifically to Gold Coast women. The column appeared daily in the “Ladies’ Corner” and featured articles by “Miss Marjorie Mensah.” The highly-educated and unmarried “Miss Mensah” presented a new “feminine” and arguably feminist voice in the Gold Coast press. In contrast with the generic content of other women’s pages that tended to be written by African men or culled from British newspapers, “Marjorie’s” articles were the product of the previous day’s news and events, replete with gossip on Accra “Society.” “Marjorie’s” column, which appeared daily in the paper, also discussed films, literature, fashion, social etiquette, social class, women’s education, sexuality, marriage, and local politics.

The strength of “Marjorie’s” opinions and the intellectual quality of her writing aroused some readers’ suspicions, leading them to conclude that “Marjorie” was the ruse of the paper’s all male staff. Among those doubting her identity as a woman, some suggested that even as a man her role as a model for other women overshadowed any concerns or questions about her gender identity. Other readers were outraged by the idea of men masquerading as women in the press, and deemed “Marjorie’s” womanhood too “lofty.” In a colonial context that had privileged men’s education over women’s, could such a woman like “Marjorie” actually exist? Women like “Marjorie” did, in fact, exist;

though, they were a very select group who came from wealthy and established coastal families. They tended to be highly-educated and typically married men who shared their educational, economic and social status. The majority of women in the colony, however, were not educated to the same level as “Marjorie.” Few girls studied beyond primary school, and secondary education was virtually non-existent for first generation educated girls. Throughout the colonial period, the proportion of boys to girls in primary school was around 4:1.⁵⁰¹ The readers doubting “Marjorie’s” identity as a woman were probably influenced by this reality. They argued that the womanhood created in “Marjorie” was so far out of touch with the average Gold Coast woman as to be ridiculous. But their real concern over “Marjorie’s” identity was the suspicion that “Marjorie” and her “lofty” womanhood were enabling the highly-educated writers for the *Times* to assert their authority over “all things literary” in Accra. They demanded that these men confess to their invention of the “fabulous” Miss Mensah, and offer the community a more realistic image of womanhood that local women could aspire to, and first generation educated and locally-educated men could use as a model in their own search for “suitable” wives as they too sought to increase their social status within Accra’s educated group. Their cries against “Marjorie’s” identity as a woman led to a lively debate that persisted for several months and was carried by two other local African-owned newspapers, the *Gold Coast Spectator* and *Gold Coast Independent*.

In its first issue, the *West Africa Times* told its readers that it was not easy to “obtain a lady correspondent,” however, this was “not because there [was] no woman in Accra well qualified for the adventurous profession of a journalist but because” most

⁵⁰¹ Stephanie Newell, “Introduction to *Marita: or the Folly of Love*.” In *Marita: or the Folly of Love*, edited by Stephanie Newell (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 17.

women were “busy in useful spheres.” It was a “real bit of luck” when “Miss Marjorie Mensah” came to their assistance.⁵⁰² While the *Times* proclaimed itself the first paper in Accra to offer the reading public an “authentic” woman’s column by a local African woman writer, a court case in 1934, *Mr. Stewart v. the Guinea Times Publishing Company*, revealed that the column was the product of a series of men and women writers. The case was initiated by the paper’s former editor, West Indian writer, poet, and longtime resident of Accra, Kenneth MacNeill Stewart, after the publication of *Us Women*, a collection of extracts from the “Ladies’ Corner” by “Marjorie Mensah” that was edited by a British woman and published in London in 1933. Stewart wrote for and edited the column during 1931 and parts of 1932 and 1933. He asked the court for copyright in the name “Marjorie Mensah.”⁵⁰³ While Stewart admitted in court that most of the chapters that appeared in *Us Women* were not written by him, he argued that he had laid down the principles for the column and the personality of “Marjorie Mensah.”⁵⁰⁴

Citing the Imperial Copyright Act of 1911, Justice Yates denied Stewart’s request. As a paid employee of the Guinea Times Publishing Company whose responsibilities included his work on the “Ladies’ Corner,” Stewart was not entitled to copyright.⁵⁰⁵ It was also determined that Stewart was not the only contributor to the

⁵⁰² “Zadig,” “Diary of a man about town,” *West Africa Times*, March 19, 1931, 2. The first penname for the column was “Regina Mensah” which was changed to “Marjorie Mensah.”

⁵⁰³ Stewart told the court that he was not on the staff of the newspaper for some part of the year 1932 and also part of 1933. He was in French Togoland for part of those years. He told the court that he did not know who was responsible for the column during his time away from the paper. The Guinea Times argued that when Stewart was away, and while on staff at the paper, other people, especially Mabel Dove wrote for the column. They also argued that of the sixty-eight chapters of the book *Us Women*, about eight were written by Stewart and sixty by Mabel Dove. “Copyright in ‘Marjorie Mensah’ Former Editor Takes Action,” *Times of West Africa*, May 11, 1934, 1.

⁵⁰⁴ “Mr Stewart versus Guinea Times,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 12, 1934, 444.

⁵⁰⁵ “Mr. Justice Yates read from the Imperial Copyright Act, 1911, applicable to the Gold Coast and stated that it was obvious that as a paid writer for the *Times of West Africa* the plaintiff [Stewart] could not be entitled to the copyright in the articles appearing in the Women’s Corner.” “Copyright in ‘Marjorie

column; Gold Coast woman writer, Mabel Dove, wrote a significant number of the articles between 1931 and 1933. According to the paper's editor-in-chief, Dr. J. B. Danquah, the idea for the "Ladies' Corner" did, in fact, belong to Kenneth MacNeill Stewart.⁵⁰⁶ As the editor of the *Times*, Stewart was responsible for editing and contributing to the "Ladies' Corner" and handling all correspondence to and from "Marjorie Mensah."⁵⁰⁷ The name "Marjorie Mensah," however, was invented by a Director of the Guinea Times Publishing Company, James Henley Coussey,⁵⁰⁸ in collaboration with Danquah and possibly Stewart.⁵⁰⁹ The first column was written by a

Mensah. *Stewart v. The Times. The Point in Issue*, *Times of West Africa*, May 12, 1934, 1. The final decision on this issue was announced in "Mr. Stewart Loses His Action. 'Marjorie Mensah' Reinstated. Interim Injunction Set Aside," *Times of West Africa*, May 16, 1934, 1.

⁵⁰⁶ In a letter to K. A. B. Jones-Quartey dated July 30, 1957, J. B. Danquah, who was the editor-in-chief of the *West Africa Times* when "Marjorie" was invented, wrote, "It was proved in Court that the idea of such a column was conceived by the editor, and that the very name 'Marjorie Mensah' was conceived by Mr. (now Sir) James Henley Coussey, a Director of the Guinea Times Publishing Co., Ltd., in consultation with the Editor." J. B. Danquah, *Journey to Independence and After, J.B. Danquah's letters, Vol.3*, ed. H. K. Akyeampong (Accra, Ghana: Watersville Publishing House, 1970), 132. Italics added. Newspaper reports confirm that MacNeill Stewart served as editor to the paper at the time of Marjorie's debut. "Copyright in 'Marjorie Mensah' Former Editor Takes Action," *Times of West Africa*, May 11, 1934. During his testimony, Danquah referred to himself as the editor-in-chief of the paper, and Stewart as the editor.

⁵⁰⁷ During his testimony, the paper's editor-in-chief, J. B. Danquah told the court that whilst Stewart was on the staff he was responsible for all correspondence to and from "Marjorie Mensah." Danquah stated that as editor-in-chief, he had opened the letters and referred them to Mr. Stewart. Part of his duties as editor was to write for the "Ladies' Corner." "Copyright in Marjorie Mensah. Mr Stewart's Lengthy Cross Examination. Crowds in Court," *Times of West Africa*, May 14, 1934, 1. Mr. Stewart received 120 pounds annum to serve as editor of the paper; his salary was higher than the paper's editor (as of May 1934), Mr. Dupigny, who did not write for the "Women's Column" by "Marjorie Mensah." Stewart was paid more than Dupigny because of his contribution to the "Ladies' Corner." "Copyright in 'Marjorie Mensah.' Mr. Stewart Quotes 'Everyman's Pocket Lawyer.' Judgment Today," *Times of West Africa*, May 15, 1934, 1.

⁵⁰⁸ Coussey was also lawyer and judge. In May 1931, he was selected to serve on the Eastern Province Bar Association. "Zadig," "A Dairy of a Man About Town," *West Africa Times*, May 13, 1931, 2.

⁵⁰⁹ Coussey told the court that the name Marjorie was one of the many Christian names which he and Dr. Danquah discussed as a replacement for the name "Regina." "Copyright in 'Marjorie Mensah.' Mr. Stewart Quotes 'Everyman's Pocket Lawyer.' Judgment Today," *Times of West Africa*, May 15, 1934, 1. Mr. Quist, representing the Postmaster General, reproduced letters written to the Post Office by the Guinea Times regarding postal orders issued to the name of "Marjorie Mensah." Mr. A. R. Augustt testified that he had set a lyric by "Marjorie Mensah" to music which was performed at the Palladium. "Copyright in 'Marjorie Mensah.' *Stewart v. the Times. The Point in Issue*," *Times of West Africa*, May 12, 1934, 1. Justice Yates ruled that the name "Marjorie Mensah" was invented by the managing director (Coussey) in conjunction with Stewart as part of their employment with the Guinea Times Publishing Company. Neither Coussey nor Stewart, therefore, could claim copyright in the name, which the Judge decided belonged to the Guinea Times. "Mr. Stewart Loses His Action. 'Marjorie Mensah' Reinstated. Interim Injunction Set

Gold Coast woman educator, Ruby Quartey Papafio, and was “built up” by Stewart.⁵¹⁰ It is unlikely that Papafio continued to write for the column beyond the first issue. At an unknown time in 1931, Stewart was joined by writer Mabel Dove.⁵¹¹ Dove was “chiefly” responsible for the column at least until her marriage to J. B. Danquah in September 1933.⁵¹² The three known writers to have used the penname “Marjorie Mensah”—Kenneth MacNeill Stewart, Mabel Dove, and Ruby Quartey Papafio, were highly-educated.⁵¹³ And, like “Marjorie,” they were members of Accra “Society.”⁵¹⁴ They

Aside,” *Times of West Africa*, May 16, 1934, 1. Mr. Augustt was a local journalist. He disagreed with “Marjorie’s” opinion on a social event in 1932 that “Marjorie” discussed in her column on February 1, 1932.

⁵¹⁰ Danquah told the court that the first article to appear in the column was written by Ruby Papafio and “built up” by Stewart. Ruby Papafio is also known as Ruby Quartey Papafio. “Copyright in Marjorie Mensah,” *Times of West Africa*, May 14, 1934, 1.

⁵¹¹ The exact date of her employment with the paper is unknown.

⁵¹² In a letter to Jones-Quartey, Danquah stated that Mabel Dove “chiefly wrote for the ‘Ladies’ Column’ at the time she was not married to me. We married in late 1933. I am not sure whether she wrote for the paper after that date.” The couple married in September 1933. The exact date of Dove’s affiliation with the newspaper is unknown. I suspect she began writing as “Marjorie Mensah” on or after April 15, 1931 and continued until at least the time of her marriage. La Ray Denzer suggests that she wrote for the column until the paper closed in 1935. La Ray Denzer, “Gender and Decolonization: A Study of Three Women in West African Public Life,” in *People and Empires in African History: Essays in Memory of Michael Crowder*, ed. J.F. Ajayi and J.D.Y. Peel (London: Longman, 1992).

⁵¹³ Other writers contributed articles to the column under their own names including Harriet Quartey, Eve Sarbah, and Lizzie Sarbah. Harriet Quartey of the Royal School of Accra published an article in the “Corner” on March 27, 1931, and on March 28, 1931, Eve Sarbah wrote about her visit to the *West Africa Times* newspaper office. She thanked the editor, Mr. MacNeill Stewart, “who so courteously took me round and explained everything to me.” On April 10, 1931, Lizzie Sarbah published a short story entitled “Just Fun.” On June 1, 1931, “E. S.,” probably Eve Sarbah, advised women to be more cautious with their husband’s money. Enoch Mensah published an article in the column on November 6, 1934. The column also included two articles, “Eve of the Open,” by “Diana Chase” on June 2 and 4, 1931. “Marjorie” told her readers that the column had been given to her by “Mr. Guy L’Estrange.” “Marjorie” offered the articles to the women in the colony who she claimed were growing increasingly interested in sport, particularly tennis. A foreign man gave “Marjorie” a column “Eve of the Open” by “Diana Chase” to encourage African women’s interest in sport. Is this a critique of the type of womanhood that the “Ladies’ Corner” was promoting? After the court ordered an interim injunction on the penname, Lizzie Sarbah published articles under her own name in the women’s column, and the paper announced, “In view of the pending interest of the writer of the Women’s Corner Miss Mabel Ellen Dove requires us to say that she is not the present writer under our women’s corner.” *Times of West Africa*, May 11, 1934, 2. Roger Gocking mentions Lizzie Sarbah as one of the contributors to “Marjorie Mensah.” “Competing Systems of Inheritance before the British Courts of the Gold Coast Colony,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, 4 (1990), 602, note 6. It is unknown if these writers or anyone else beyond Dove and Stewart were writing as “Marjorie Mensah” during the life of the column. The Guinea Times Publishing Company argued that when Stewart was on staff and when he was away in Togoland during parts of 1932

attended events at the elite Rodger Club, spent their weekends at the Accra races and other society events, and read the latest books in English. They traveled within West Africa, usually along the coast, to England and to Europe.

As Audrey Gadzekpo's groundbreaking research on African women's contribution to the Gold Coast press demonstrates, the practice of including women's sections in the newspapers was longstanding. Prior to the "Marjorie Mensah" column in 1931, though, these columns were written by men or borrowed from British newspapers. "Marjorie's" column was the first to have been allegedly authored by a local African woman. I argue that the invention of "Marjorie," which coincided with the return of WASU students from London and their founding of the popular urban press, was part of WASU students' political agenda to develop their nationhood at home. The highly-educated African woman personality developed through "Marjorie" was deeply connected to their nationalist project that envisioned an educated monogamous couple and nuclear family at its center. "Marjorie" was an opportunity for these writers to experiment with different kinds of womanhood, blending and augmenting a variety of images. She also allowed them to explore how women (as related to men) would fit into their vision of the nation, beyond her role as a wife and mother, but as a worker and socially engaged citizen.

As Gadzekpo observes, "Marjorie" was full of contradictions and layers. She was smart, independent, witty, and a feminist. She worried about the education of women and the morality of men; she was the "New Woman" as African, educated, independent, and

and 1933, Dove and "other people" submitted articles under the penname. "Copyright in 'Marjorie Mensah.' Former Editor Takes Action," *Times of West Africa*, May 11, 1934, 1.

⁵¹⁴ This is definitely true of Mabel Dove and Ruby Papafio. Both women were from elite coastal families, and both appear regularly as guests of society affairs. Less is known about Kenneth MacNeill Stewart.

devoted to her country and its many needs for social reform. At the same time, she encouraged a British colonial understanding of modern womanhood, one that imagined women as housewives and mothers educated in domestic science and western approaches to child rearing. Gadzekpo attributes some of the inconsistency in the types of womanhood represented in “Marjorie’s” column to its having had multiple authors. While certainly a contributing factor, another possibility exists. I argue that the contradictions and inconsistencies are largely owed to the fact that the meaning of womanhood was itself in the process of being articulated. The “Marjorie Mensah” column became a productive discursive space for educated Africans (men and a handful of elite women) to imagine women, gender, and nation, a process that involved multiple voices and discourses.

Educated West Africans’ vision of womanhood was very much under construction during this period and was tied to other formations, most notably formations of nation and class. Their imagining of a gender, class and nation through “Marjorie” grew out of intense debate in the African public sphere between elite and non-elite African readers and writers. British colonial, imperial, European, and North American constructions of modern womanhood that circulated within the Atlantic world at this time entered into these debates as productive forces—both as representations of womanhood (and nation) to be defined against, and as images to be appropriated and “Africanized.” Thus, the womanhood that the *Times* pursued through their invention of “Marjorie” did not convey a single image of African womanhood. Rather “Marjorie” was a provocative invitation sent by leaders of the *Times* to readers and writers to begin the process of

imagining a new African womanhood that they hoped would match with their own aspirations for a future self-governing nation.

Readers of all backgrounds and proficiencies in English responded to this invitation by sending letters to the *Times* in which they praised and critiqued “Marjorie,” using her as an opportunity to see their own opinions on social and literary life written up in the press. These letters were the primary means through which marginalized readers (locally-educated men and highly-educated elite women) contributed to newspaper discussions. Some readers challenged what they believed was an elite fantasy of African womanhood, and lobbied for a more realistic set of gender expectations for educated Africans, and expressed their own views on womanhood and the “marriage question.” In all instances, readers’ letters and “Marjorie” presented these men and women with opportunities to whisper their experiences, concerns, ideas, and opinions into the “public ear.” Columns by “Marjorie” and “Zadig,” readers’ letters, and the main sections of the paper were in conversation and came to form a space of engagement and production in which readers and writers Accra’s English-literate group took part in imagining a new womanhood and nation.

Focusing primarily on the first two years of the column’s publication, and the letters to the editor that appeared in the *West Africa Times*, *Gold Coast Spectator*, and *Gold Coast Independent* on the topic of “Marjorie Mensah,” I explore “Marjorie’s” educated womanhood as an anti-colonial argument that was central to the political goals of Accra’s professional group. “Marjorie” was a critical sign of their modernity and representation of a new Africa. As part of an internal conversation, she was also the professional group’s response to a growing community of new readers in the city.

“Marjorie” became a critical boundary marker, drawing lines between their own set and the “local classes.” She helped the elite order “literary” and social life of the Accra, asserting elites’ social and political leadership of “Society” and the “other” classes. “Marjorie” and her counterpart “Zadig” taught locally-educated men and women how to be “modern” Africans in what they perceived to be a rapidly changing world. As discussed in Chapter 5, the local classes weren’t willing to play the docile “young” pupils of the *Times*’s elite writers.

As we have seen, the university-educated elite were not the only educated Africans in the city. The locally-educated had their own opinions about what they and Africa ought to be. Enquiries into “Marjorie’s” identity expressed competition between elite and non-elite readers and writers, that is, between the university graduates (and former WASU members) who controlled the local papers and highly ambitious locally-educated men who were interested in elevating their own status in literary society by writing to the papers, suggesting reform, founding their own literary clubs, and participating in public debates. “Marjorie’s” opinions about ideal manhood and womanhood, marriage and family life critically ignored the reality of these men’s lives. Most locally-educated men were not as educated as the fictive “Marjorie”—they had not studied abroad and most would marry women with little or no educational experience. “Marjorie’s” womanhood and her support of monogamous companionate civil and church-based marriages to a “trained girl” interfered with their own ambitions to rise within educated society. If an educated man was expected to marry a woman like “Marjorie” in order to advance his social standing in literary society and few women like “Marjorie” actually existed, how could he advance his status?

Locally-educated men entered the discussion of “Marjorie’s” identity with their own concerns about finding marriage partners who shared their educational experiences and could act as “helpmates.” They were also armed with their own opinions about how Africans ought to marry, and were benefiting from their negotiation between the two forms. Through their letters challenging “Marjorie’s” identity, these men introduced their own views into the wider debates about womanhood, marriage, patriotism, and a future Africa. “Marjorie Mensah” and the many reactions she inspired—readers’ letters, newspaper articles, poems, song lyrics, a cabaret show and a book, provide a window into the ways different members of Accra’s educated group debated questions of women and marriage in dialogue with each other within colonial, imperial, and international contexts.

The “Women’s Page” in the Gold Coast Press

The habit of including a women’s page in the Anglophone African press of the Gold Coast began in the 1880s with articles for “ladies” that appeared in the *Gold Coast Times* and *Western Echo*.⁵¹⁵ Women’s columns from this period were African-authored

⁵¹⁵ The July 21, 1880 issue of the *Gold Coast Times* contained a report on the “Rational Dress Exhibition” in England sponsored by the Rational Dress Association. The article was probably imported from a London paper; however, additional research is needed to confirm this and to understand practices of appropriation and adaption in the Gold Coast press. The *Echo*’s column ran for two years and was written by an African man using the pseudonym “Cancoanid.” Cancoanid, who Gadzekpo and other press historians believe was the paper’s owner and editor James Hutton Mills, asked women to submit letters and/or extracts from articles they had read and enjoyed. He presented his column as a space of self-expression for African women; a space for women to present the “true” picture of African womanhood to the world and to overturn the negative images of African womanhood which dominated British travel narratives from this period. Few women responded to Cancoanid’s plea; rather the column was dominated by letters from male readers on the contradictions of the “female sex.” Cancoanid’s articles were more instructive. He urged women to grow gardens, make jam, and involve themselves in public life by participating in Accra’s clubland. Audrey Sitsofe Gadzekpo, “Women’s Engagement with Gold Coast Print Culture from 1857 to 1957” (PhD Diss., University of Birmingham, 2001), 70, 106-110, 157.

or imported from British newspapers. Their content was strongly influenced by British values, particularly the Victorian self-help philosophy and visions of British femininity. At the same time, feminism mainly associated with the women's suffrage movement in England was held up as a model to emulate. The *Echo's* column encouraged Gold Coast women to create their own mutual improvement societies and read the British *Women's Suffrage Journal*.⁵¹⁶ The practice of including a women's page continued into the twentieth century, and came to occupy a critical space in new popular press of the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1926, the *Gold Coast Independent* published two anonymous male-authored articles for female readers, followed by a column by "Lady Elena," who represented herself as an upper class British woman who wrote for African women from her home in London.⁵¹⁷ Lady Elena discussed "English high society," the Royal Family, and fashion trends in London and Paris. It is unclear if the column was meant to be satirical, or if it was to serve as an example of the kind of womanhood the paper wanted Gold Coast women to emulate.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁶ *Western Echo*, November, 28 1885. I assume the writer was referring his readers to Lydia Becker's the *Women's Suffrage Journal* founded in 1870 in Manchester, England. Gadzekpo, "Women's Engagement with Gold Coast Print Culture from 1857 to 1957," 108.

⁵¹⁷ Both columns were anonymously authored. The first focused on women's responsibilities, and the second discussed time management, lemons, and needlework. "Lady Elena's" column began in December 1928. The address which appeared at the end of her articles read: St. Ives, Gerrards Cross, London. Gadzekpo speculates that it was directly imported from a newspaper in England and adapted by the *Independent's* editorial staff. The column's absence of local references and concentration on England strongly support her argument. Gadzekpo, "Women's Engagement with Gold Coast Print Culture from 1857 to 1957," 110, 154.

⁵¹⁸ Columns published by the *Independent* after 1935 were slightly less Euro-centered. In July 1935, Elena's column was replaced by "Amma Kuma's" "Women's Realm." The name Amma is a common first name used by the Akan people for girl children born on Saturday. "Amma" offered her readers domestic advice, including how to make jam and prepare European meals. Fashion sketches of European women in European dresses and white babies in Angora wool caps accompanied her articles. While this column attempted to connect with African readers, the content of its articles and side sketches continued to privilege English and European images of womanhood. Owing to the local detail, it is less likely that the entire column was taken directly from a British paper, though it likely that certain elements of the column, such as the fashion sketches, were imported from news sources outside the Gold Coast. "Amma Kuma" was replaced in October 1938 by an anonymous column called the "Ladies Happy Corner." The "Happy

The convention of African men authoring women's columns and the image of Victorian womanhood that earlier generations of coastal elites had been modeling in their women's pages for years was finally broken in 1931 with the introduction of the "Ladies' Corner" by the beguiling "Miss Marjorie Mensah" in the *West Africa Times*. Of all the women's columns that appeared in the Accra press, the "Ladies' Corner," or rather the enigmatic "Marjorie," captured the attention of readers both near and far. The *Times's* inclusion of a women's column was not unusual, though it was the first women's column allegedly written by a local African woman.

Through "Marjorie," the *Times* invented and displayed the New Woman as African, laboring to define who "she" would be in a post-colonial nation, encouraging women readers to see her as a role model for their own advancement. "Marjorie" actively re-worked the Victorian upper-class model of femininity that had strongly influenced previous women's columns, adding to it British feminism and the New Woman to create the New Woman as African. The New Woman as African imagined through "Marjorie" would not be confined to the drawing room. She worked in offices, and demanded women's equality with men in terms of education, job opportunities, and pay. She wrote for local newspapers. She participated in her own advancement through self-help. She founded literary and social clubs, created educational opportunities for women, and followed political and social debates.

Most critically of all "Marjorie" and the "Ladies' Corner" became canvasses upon which the educated elite imaged the nation, using "Marjorie" and her column to dissect

Corner" was more explicitly tailored to the lives of English-literate African women in Accra. It included profiles of elite African women, fictional stories about women in Accra, recipes, and a "Dear Aunt Agony" column which dispensed advice to readers on the contemporary social mores and etiquette of the Gold Coast. Gadzekpo, "Women's Engagement with Gold Coast Print Culture from 1857 to 1957," 112.

and diagnose women's/Africa's situation, offer intelligent reform, and create a narrative of women's/Africa's path to progress. The creation of the New Woman as African was as much about Africa as she was about the elites' project for a West African nation. In fact, both were inseparable. For example, "Marjorie" believed women "victims of wrong comparison and sinned against because [they did] not approach near enough to standards that it took [men] centuries to establish." Women, she argued, were on the path to becoming "modern," and, therefore, "must be appreciated for [their] youth and that alone."⁵¹⁹ A parallel story was at play. Just as "Marjorie" had depicted women as striving to catch up with men's "modernity," other parts of the paper and the WASU in London depicted Africa as the "young" and up-and-coming "daughter" of the Empire. Like the Africa woman in "Marjorie's" narrative, the young Africa was also a victim of "wrong comparison and sinned against" and was fast approaching the "standards" that it had taken other societies "centuries to establish." In speaking about women's progress, "Marjorie" was also speaking about Africa's progress, assuring her readers (African and European) that Africa was very close to being as "modern" as the rest of the Empire.

Joining "Marjorie" in her efforts to bring about a new womanhood and Africa was the paper's men's columnist "Zadig" and his column, "Diary of a Man About Town."⁵²⁰ The two newspaper personalities worked together to gender the public sphere, clearing a space for highly-educated (and opinionated) women within it, and, in turn, altering men's roles. Together, these personalities spun a gendered fantasy of a future Africa. As more women like "Marjorie" entered the public sphere as guardians of morality and as agents

⁵¹⁹ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, August 11, 1931, 2.

⁵²⁰ "Zadig" was a penname used by editor-in-chief J. B. Danquah, though it is possible that other writers used the name.

of social reform, professional men would be free to focus their attention on “men’s” issues—politics, economics and intellectual life. To make this work, however, men needed to encourage women to become strong social reformers in the public sphere. “Marjorie,” as the highly-educated woman reformer, was meant to facilitate real women’s movement into the world of clubs and newspapers, that is, the “social and national life” of the country; the stage upon which the new Africa would be played out. “Marjorie” taught women how to be the New Woman, both by example and through her daily commentary on the activities of other women in other countries and parts of the Empire. “Zadig” pointed men of his class (referred to as “society gentlemen”) to issues he believed worthy of their attention and kept them informed of the latest political gossip. Both columns offered models of idealized gender roles and provided readers with information about what they ought not be or do, and images that they ought to emulate and aspire to.

“Marjorie” and “Zadig” also had an important role to play in the professional group’s imagining of the nation (as the New Africa). The New Africa, sometimes referred to as the “New Age,” was a concept full of hope that captured a wide and at times contradictory range of ideas, plans, and dreams for the future of the Gold Coast, Africa, and Africans. Also true of earlier generations, concern about the future dominated the intellectual life of Accra’s educated group during the 1930s. The concept of the future continuously shifted as each member of the community added their own visions to the collective imaginings of it—readers, writers, and debaters dressed Africa’s present in new clothing, re-presented its history, and anticipated and worked towards their future position in an imagined post-colonial world. Critical to its creation were

discussions of the past, an “Old Age” that was also an important source of debate and reconstruction. Ideas about the old and the new were tossed about and debated in the “high” and “low,” same and mixed sexed club rooms of Accra. The *West Africa Times* played a key role in this conversation. It was arguably one of the primary vehicles through which a certain section of Accra’s educated elite experimented with different political futures for the Gold Coast and Africa at this time.

The fictive “Marjorie” and “Zadig” were essential to this group’s imaginings of a new Africa. “Zadig’s” new age saw a coalition of African literary and social clubs working in unity and co-operation for the greater good of the country, nation, and race—demonstrating Africa’s “will to think” to European and world audiences. It saw several new senior positions available for university-educated Africans in government service and the election of these men (by popular vote) to the country’s Legislative Council. In “Marjorie’s” column “plucky” African women competed with men for public office, married women and young girls created authentic “African” art and fashion, boys and girls learned the history of Africa free of “foreign conceits,” and Accra’s Korle Lagoon became filled with gondolas and “fashionable” men and women.⁵²¹

The *Times* had an agenda—to create an educated citizenry of patriotic men and women that would be part of a new West African nation at the heart of which lay the new African woman and man. Both characters were instrumental to the paper’s efforts to present a new image of gender and nation. They were responsible for gathering up “the different factions” of educated men and women “into some great national body capable

⁵²¹ “Zadig,” “A Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, July 29, 1931, 2 and *Times of West Africa*, February 19, 1932, 2. “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, July 29, 1931, 2, *Times of West Africa*, March 2-3, 1932, 2 and March 5, 1932, 2.

of asserting some really dominant influence over the life—the political life—of the country with a reforming tone similar to the movements of its kind all over the world.” The *Times* sought to provide “all young men and women of Accra—Lawyers and Doctors, Pressmen, Telephone Operators, clerks”—with a gendered script they could “follow like inspired crusaders in the wake of a brilliant and glorious future.”⁵²²

Who Was Marjorie Mensah?

It would appear that Mabel Dove wrote a large percentage of the articles published in the column between 1931 and 1933. She was a woman from an elite coastal family. Her father was Francis Thomas Dove, a lawyer and resident of Accra whose family was from Sierra Leone. Her mother was Eva Buckman, a Ga business woman who had lost her wealth speculating in cocoa during the 1920s. At a young age Dove was sent by her father to Freetown where she completed her primary and secondary education. As a young woman in Sierra Leone, she spent her time reading, founding a girls’ cricket club, and participating in the local dramatic society.⁵²³ She was educated in England, but unlike most elite women from this time period who were expected to “acquire what is known as ‘polish’, no doubt to be charming and well-bred and be able to play a good game of tennis,” through their education abroad, Dove was determined to receive a practical education that would enable her to find salaried employment (and

⁵²² “Public Meeting” of the “Programme Youths” at Palladium to Discuss Facts Related to Dr. Danquah’s Stay in England,” *Times of West Africa*, November 3, 1934, 3. “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, December 24, 1931, 2.

⁵²³ Denzer, “Gender and Decolonization,” 219.

financial independence) upon her return to West Africa.⁵²⁴ During her final days at St. Michael's College in Hurstpierpoint (near Brighton) she completed a four-month secretarial course at Gregg Commercial College. Upon returning to Accra in 1936, Dove joined the Elder Dempster shipping company as shorthand typist, one of the only women working in the office at that time. Later she worked for another European firm, G. B. Ollivant, and in the 1940s she worked as a manager of the goods and fabrics department at Leventis.⁵²⁵ In the spring of 1931, she "charmed" Dr. Danquah with her writing-style and, at his request, joined the *West Africa Times* as one of the writers for the "Ladies' Corner."⁵²⁶

Dove's work at the *Times* marked the beginning of her career in journalism. She wrote for a number of newspapers in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, first as "Marjorie Mensah," and later as "Eben Alakija" for the *Nigerian Daily Times*, "Dama Dumas" for the *African Morning Post*, and "Akosuah Dzatsui" for the *Accra Evening News*. During the 1940s and 50s she became an active member and writer for the Convention People's Party (CPP). She wrote "fierce, passionate anti-colonial, pro-independence articles in the CPP paper and the *Accra Evening News*."⁵²⁷ Between 1954 and 1956, she served as the first woman member of the National Assembly of Ghana.⁵²⁸ While unusual in her educational, occupational, and later, her political achievements, she had much in common

⁵²⁴ Denzer, "Gender and Decolonization," 219.

⁵²⁵ She was paid 7 pounds per month as a clerk for Elder Dempster. Denzer, "Gender and Decolonization," 219.

⁵²⁶ The exact date of her employment with the *Times* is unknown. Denzer suggests shortly after the paper's founding in 1931. She suggests that Dove wrote for the column a bit in 1932 and totally in 1933-4. This does not match the timeline that I am constructing. I believe that Dove wrote for the column between 1931 and until her marriage to Danquah in September 1933, though she might have authored some of the columns in 1933 and 1934. Denzer, "Gender and Decolonization," 220. K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, "First Lady of Pen and Parliament – A Portrait," in *The Ghana Association of Writers International Centenary Evenings with Aggrey of Africa* (Accra: Government of Ghana, 1975), 41.

⁵²⁷ Jones-Quartey, "First Lady of Pen and Parliament," 40, 42.

⁵²⁸ Jones-Quartey, "First Lady of Pen and Parliament," 40.

with other highly-educated women of her generation and class, many of whom founded schools and clubs, worked as teachers, headmistresses, and government clerks, gave public lectures on girls' education, and organized charities and social events during the 1930s. Dove herself was a member of the elite Ladies' Musical Society and often made the newspapers' lists of "noteworthy" guests at "society" affairs. The other known woman writer behind "Marjorie" was Ruby Quartey Papafio, the Headmistress of the Accra Government Girls School. Papafio, much more than Dove, was a strong presence on the social and literary club scene.⁵²⁹ In 1930, she gave a speech to the Gold Coast Youth Conference, and in 1931 participated in the West African Youth Co-operative (WAYCA) conference at the Rodger Club.⁵³⁰ She also gave public lectures at local clubs. In 1939, both women gave radio talks in support of the war effort.⁵³¹

The third known writer behind "Marjorie Mensah" was Kenneth MacNeill Stewart.⁵³² Stewart was a longtime newspaper writer who was a West Indian man

⁵²⁹ Papafio's lecture on sacrifice was announced in the *Times of West Africa*, March 4, 1932. She also spoke at a meeting on education for girls. *West Africa Times*, April 19, 1931, 1.

⁵³⁰ The Youth Conference, *First Steps towards a National Fund* (Accra, Ghana: The Continuation Committee, Gold Coast Youth Conference, 1938), 23. The West African Youth Co-operative Association (WAYCA) was the outgrowth of the "longtime desire" for co-operation between intellectuals from the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the Gambia for "united problem solving." The editors of the newspapers in the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia helped ensure its success by providing widespread publicity for the conference. "West African Youth Co-operative," *West Africa Times*, December 31, 1931.

⁵³¹ Wendell P. Holbrook, "British Propaganda and the Mobilization of the Gold Coast War Effort, 1939-1945," *The Journal of African History* 26, 4, World War II and Africa (1985), 354.

⁵³² Newspaper reports indicate that there was a small West Indian population in the city which can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century, when the British government brought European and West Indian troops into the territory to assist them in their battle with the Asante. Roger Gocking's research indicates that some of the politically active Western-educated residents of Cape Coast were of West Indian origin. In an article on indirect rule, Roger Gocking mentions George E. Moore who he describes as a "typical educated newcomer to the native order" who, after failing in his career as an independent cocoa broker was installed as a captain of one of Cape Coast's *asafu* companies in 1924. Moore's father was a soldier from the West Indies in the West Indian Regiment which was stationed in Cape Coast in the 1890s. It is possible that Kenneth MacNeill Stewart's family remained in the region after the battle had ended, though this has not yet been confirmed. Roger Gocking, "Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast: Competition for Office and the Invention of Tradition," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 28, 3 (1994), 426, 436. A note on

naturalized in the Gold Coast. He began his career in journalism as the editor of an obscure journal called *Gold Coast Pioneer* in 1921. During the 1930s he worked for the *West Africa Times* and *Daily Echo*.⁵³³ In the early 1930s, he was employed as editor of the *West Africa Times*. The exact dates of his employment are uncertain, but it appears that he worked as the paper's editor during the first years of its existence, followed by two leaves of absence in 1932 and 1933. In June 1934, he returned to the paper as acting editor while Danquah was in England as the Secretary to the Gold Coast Delegation.⁵³⁴ He worked as the acting editor for the *Times* until it closed in the early months of 1935, at which point he became the editor of the *Daily Echo* owned by the Independent Press. Stewart was a "puckish character who wrote with wit and sarcasm, and was a factor on the anti-colonial scene" during the 1930s.⁵³⁵ He was also known among his contemporaries as an "experienced poet" who "donned the garb of a political critic."⁵³⁶ His poems were published in the local papers during the 1930s, and in 1940 he published a collection of poems on the Second World War entitled *The Gold Coast Answers*, followed by the publication of *The Ballad of the Village Girl*.⁵³⁷ In the 1950s, his poetry

West Indians in the Gold Coast is provided by "Zadig." Mr. William Henry Simmons was a West Indian man who had work for the Gold Coast Police 27 years, since 1910. "Zadig" wrote, "Like so many of our West Indian brothers who have added to the richness of life in the Gold Coast hails from British Guiana. Among his countrymen may be counted Dr. Murrell, one of Accra's most popular doctors, and late chairman of the Rodger Club Committee, and Mr. Barbour James, retired officer of the Post Office, now doing good work for the Gold Coast and the West Indies in England." *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

⁵³³ And probably other local papers.

⁵³⁴ The delegation set sail at the beginning of June 1934.

⁵³⁵ K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, *A Summary History of the Ghana Press, 1822-1960* (Accra: Ghana Information Services Dept, 1974), 23.

⁵³⁶ Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey. An Autobiography* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1970), 258-9.

⁵³⁷ Stewart published a sonnet on government in the March 7, 1932 issue of the *Times of West Africa*. A biographical note on Stewart included in his war poems describes him as a "young African who, although of West Indian descent, has lived almost all his life in the Gold Coast and was for many years the editor of a daily newspaper in Accra." The poems celebrate Africans fight for England and under the banner of the British Empire. Kenneth MacNeill Stewart, *The Gold Coast Answers. Nine War Poems* (Accra: Government Printer, 1940). The Ballad is a portrait of a new Ghana which the Village Girl, pure and untouched by colonialism, represents. She is contrasted with the corrupt, immoral, and faded "city girl,"

appeared in the journal *African Affairs*.⁵³⁸ During his early employment with the *Times*, he helped create the personality “Marjorie Mensah,” edited the column and occasionally published articles under that name. He was also responsible for all correspondence to and from “Marjorie” during his editorship. As acting editor of the paper in 1934, Stewart authored *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Mr. Shaw* published under the penname “Marjorie Mensah” in the “Women’s Corner” between September 25 and October 18, 1934.⁵³⁹ It is more than likely that Stewart was also the author of the December 4, 1933 issue in which “Marjorie” discussed Shaw’s *Adventures of the Black*

the product of the “old age,” the Gold Coast under colonial rule. Kenneth MacNeill Stewart, *The Ballad of the Village Girl* (Accra: Guinea Press, date unknown, probably after independence).

⁵³⁸ Kenneth MacNeill Stewart, “An Idea of Happiness,” *African Affairs* 51, 203 (1952): 1155-156.

⁵³⁹ In her autobiography, Hewitt states that “Marjorie” sent her additional manuscripts by post after they had agreed upon the publication of *Us Women*. One manuscript was *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Mr. Shaw* and the other was *Gone Native*, a play that Hewitt described as an African-authored “White Cargo” play. Around the time of the lawsuit over copyright in “Marjorie Mensah,” which Stewart brought against the Guinea Times (owner’s of the *West Africa Times*), “Marjorie” sent Hewitt a letter confessing that the writer with whom she had been corresponding with by mail, and the author of these additional manuscripts, was West Indian writer, Kenneth MacNeill Stewart. Kathleen Hewitt, *The Only Paradise* (London: Jarrolds Ltd., 1945), 136. Stewart lost the lawsuit and was unable to get his manuscripts published in London. While serving as acting editor for the *Times of West Africa* in 1934, he likely published *Adventures* and possibly *A Woman in Jade* under the penname Marjorie in the “Women’s Corner” of newspaper. *A Woman in Jade* is a response to Leon Gordon’s *White Cargo*; it shows African men’s response to the problem of “cargo” on the coast, which the author describes as “black cargo,” used to reference educated African women who spent the best part of their youth engaging in witty banter, revelry, and sexual relationships with white English Officers. It is also possible that Stewart authored *Naadu*, another short play that appeared in the “Women’s Corner” before *A Woman in Jade* (November 1-5, 1934). *Naadu* is the story of a love relationship between a woman brought up “according to the fetish faith,” and a “handsome Christian youth.” The lawsuit that Stewart brought against the Guinea Times for copyright in the name Marjorie provides further supports the possibility that Stewart, and not Mabel Dove, authored *Adventures* and possibly also *A Woman in Jade* and *Naadu*. As noted by J. B. Danquah in a letter to press historian K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, Stewart’s objective for bringing forth a lawsuit was not for the purpose of claiming responsibility for the entire column; rather Stewart wanted copyright (ownership) in the penname “Marjorie Mensah” because he intended to publish additional works under that name. J. B. Danquah, *Journey to Independence and After, Vol.3*, 132. By the time Stewart brought the lawsuit against the Guinea Times in May 1934, he had already mailed his manuscripts to Hewitt in London. In his correspondence with Hewitt he claimed to be “Marjorie Mensah.” If Hewitt had agreed to help him publish his writing, he would not have been in a position to legally claim authorship of these publications, or he would have had to confess to Hewitt that he was not “Marjorie Mensah” (which he ultimately did); thus, it is possible that the lawsuit was Stewart’s way ensuring copyright in the penname in the event that Hewitt published his manuscripts. Once it was determined that he could not claim copyright in “Marjorie,” Stewart sent a letter to Hewitt in which he confessed that he had been masquerading as “Marjorie” in his correspondence with her. This letter was probably sent by Stewart after the court case was closed, probably between mid-May and early June before J. B. Danquah arrived in England with the Gold Coast Delegation.

Girl in her Search for God, and parodies by Charles Maxwell's *The White Girl in Search of God*, and W.R. Matthew's *The Adventures of Gabriel in Search of Mr Shaw*. If Stewart is the author, the article was probably written while he was working on his own parody of Shaw's essay.⁵⁴⁰

While Dove probably authored most of the articles I discuss in this section (1931-33), Stewart and Papafio were contributed to the development of the personality "Marjorie Mensah." Stewart played a much larger role in "Marjorie's" development than Papafio, whose involvement with the paper after the first issue is unknown; however, Papafio was probably a source of inspiration. In my writing about the column, I approach "Marjorie" as a composite figure that became a real and powerful personality. She cannot be reduced to any single author or even a collection of writers. My focus is on "Marjorie": an image of an educated African woman in print, and the effect she had on the public's imagination of womanhood and Africa at this time.

The fictive "Marjorie" had much in common with the stereotype of the New Woman in England at the turn of the nineteenth century attended Girton College, Cambridge, rode a bicycle, insisted on rational dress, and smoked in public.⁵⁴¹ The fictive "Marjorie" spent her primary school years at a Catholic school for girls at Cape Coast, followed by secondary school in Ainsdale, a small village on the Lancashire Coast.⁵⁴² She studied literature at Girton College and music at the Royal Academy in

⁵⁴⁰ "Marjorie Mensah," *Times of West Africa*, December 4, 1933, 2.

⁵⁴¹ Carolyn Christensen Nelson, *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001), ix. The phrase "New Woman" was coined with the publication of Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* in 1883.

⁵⁴² The school was managed by the "MacPhails" sisters, two daughters of a local clergyman. In her portrayal of her years abroad, "Marjorie" wrote about her trip by boat from West Africa to Liverpool and

London.⁵⁴³ However, there were as many similarities between “Marjorie,” the New Woman as African, and the New Woman as English, as there were differences: “Marjorie” did not smoke, which she found much too vulgar and un-lady like; she would rather own a Ford car of the latest model than a bicycle; and, she did not have a counterpart in “decadent” men like Oscar Wilde. Her ideal companion was a “society gentleman” a lawyer and intellectual like “Zadig.” And, different from new women in England, the press, in this case, the *Times*, celebrated “Marjorie” as a positive example for women to follow. She was the paper’s charming representation of the new Africa.

Reminiscent of Sarah Grand’s “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” published in the *North American Review* in 1894, “Marjorie” argued that a woman’s place was not only in the home. “Women’s sphere” incorporated the social and national life of the country.⁵⁴⁴ She described herself as a social reformer, interested in defending moral values, but at the same time lobbying for women’s advancement in education and business, which she saw as essential to national and racial progress. Recalling her first day at the newspaper, “Marjorie” wrote,

from there, an electric train to her school in Ainsdale. “Marjorie” reported that she had never taken an electric train before. While she delighted in this novel experience, she found the English countryside rather dull. It lacked the “fine stately trees full of leaves” found in the tropics and the house were a dull brick structures which resembled little factories owing to the smoke stacks billowing from their roof tops. She missed the verandas and gardens characteristic of the houses she knew in West Africa. When she arrived at the train station she was met by an English man. She later discovered that the man was the proprietor and driver of the village coach. She watched in shock as a white man in uniform acted as her porter, lifting her trunk and taking it away for her. She “had never seen a white man do such a thing.” In Africa, she reported, white men were privileged and never performed the menial work that was reserved for Africans. As they rode to the school, the old coach bumped along the brick road that she claimed was reminiscent of Dickens. It is also interesting to note that “Marjorie” did not travel to the school alone, but was accompanied by her brother. “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 27, 1931, 2.

⁵⁴³ The description of her school days is based on three different accounts offered in the “Marjorie Mensah” column (April 29, 1931, April 30, 1931, and July 26, 1933). The story of her school days in England is further developed by Mabel Dove in the July 26, 1933 issue. I have blended these accounts in my own narrative of “Marjorie” at school.

⁵⁴⁴ Nelson, *A New Woman Reader*, ix.

I thought that a thing that was inspired out of a mere joke could be eventually with propriety turned to good purpose in the interest of our women and I started, therefore, to advocate suffrage for African women; the improvement of their estate, and for an educational system that is more utilitarian and beneficial, and I hope to be able to accomplish still more by the Grace of God for the good of my colleagues and my beloved country.⁵⁴⁵

She also admired Amy Johnson, arguing in one issue that her solo flight from England to Australia was proof that “we” women “can do whatever we have willed to do,” and a source of inspiration for African women to “start doing things for ourselves.”⁵⁴⁶ “Marjorie” was the first strong “feminine” voice in the Gold Coast press to write about social reform as “women’s issues,” and to insist that social reform was part of a “women’s sphere.” She argued that highly-educated Gold Coast women, like women in “all civilized countries,” helped “society” determine and regulate moral standards.⁵⁴⁷ In her own role as a woman social reformer, she worked on behalf of her country and “society” to bring about a “virtuous womanhood” and nation by involving herself in all aspects of social and national life. Though, as we’ll soon see, “Marjorie” was paradoxical in her embrace of European “feminism,” which she sanctioned as often as she critiqued.

⁵⁴⁵ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, July 4, 1931.

⁵⁴⁶ Amy Johnson was the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia in 1930. “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, November 2, 1931, 2.

⁵⁴⁷ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, March 10-11, 1932, 2.

“Marjorie,” an Imperial Confabulation

“Marjorie” was the product of several interwoven images of modern womanhood that circulated within Atlantic and imperial networks of the interwar period. Her new womanhood incorporated images from Africa, the British Empire, Europe, and the Americas. George Elliot, Angelina Grimké, Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst, Gwendolyn Bennett, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Sarojini Naidu, Amy Johnson, Mercy and Ruby Papafio, and Dr. Helen Hendrie all made appearances in her “Corner.”⁵⁴⁸ “Marjorie” discussed African women as “women of the Empire,” and looked to English women as much as to Indian women for inspiration. “Marjorie” was intrigued by Indian women dressing in the clothing of “their own nation” and participating in politics.⁵⁴⁹ She wrote, “If an Indian lady of rank could appear at Buckingham Palace in her own national costume and look perfectly appropriate and in good taste.” She asked her readers, what is to “hinder us women adopting a similar attitude?” She suggested African women be “a trifle more African” in their dress and less eager to “mimick Paris and London or New York”—to follow these trends was to be “so much counterfeit and hardly worth the trouble.”⁵⁵⁰ And yet, she adored Victorian-era dresses and wished they would make a

⁵⁴⁸ For Marjorie’s discussion of African American writers, see May 21, 22 and 26, 1931. For a discussion of the Pankhurst sisters, see May 12, 1931. Mercy Papafio is discussed on May 18, 1931. Ruby Papafio’s speech at the Young Peoples’ Literary Club (YPLC) is discussed on February 26, 1932. She compares Papafio to other “great women,” including Nurse Edith Cavell and Joan of Arc. Several issues in August 1931 were devoted to a lecture by Dr. Helen Hendrie’s on child welfare. “Marjorie” revisited Hendrie’s work on November 19, 1931.

⁵⁴⁹ The *Times* regularly reported on Gandhi and his movement on the front page of the paper. In 1934, Mr. Jaipal Singh, M.A. of Achimota College gave “A Masterly Lecture” hosted by the “Nationalist Literary Society” on the topic of “Renascent India” at the Bishop’s School in Accra. The *Times* wrote, “Hear his lecture and be well informed.” *Times of West Africa*, November 3, 1934, 2.

⁵⁵⁰ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, September 3, 1931, 2. She mentioned her approval at seeing an Indian woman at Euston station who was dressed her “national dress.” “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 23, 1931, 2. Reader “F.S.H.,” a British South African man, sent a letter to “Marjorie” on African women’s dress. He claimed that “Marjorie” was an “advocate of national costume.” He wondered how she could want girls in Accra to wear silk stockings.

come-back, and provided her readers with regular updates on the latest fashions from England and Europe.⁵⁵¹ She hoped that the “frocks” worn by “European ladies” in Accra might “inspire” African women, who she believed had a flare for fashion, but seemed to lack a certain “excellent taste” so easily depicted by Europeans.⁵⁵² Less than a week later, however, she applauded Indian women delegates at the “famous and historic” Round Table Conference for wearing “their national costume.” She was most impressed with the “brilliant personality of Mrs. Naidu, the famous Indian woman nationalist and writer of eminence.” “Marjorie” had much in common with Mrs. Naidu. Both women were “English trained” and “old Girton Girl[s] of exceptional ability.” Mrs. Naidu represented everything “Marjorie” was trying to inspire in her woman readers. She was a true “patriot and a woman of tremendous bravery, daring and nerve.” She had given herself over to the good of her country, in order that her “ideals might live and inspire all of India—and more, the women of the world.” “Marjorie” hoped “a woman of Mrs.

He wrote, “Personally, I must say that few know how to carry European dress as they do their own. Native Costume, and when it comes to girls with no instep trying to walk with a No. 5 shoe on a No. 7 foot, some of them remind me of the dancing Duck that I saw at an Agricultural show some years ago. The Duck was placed on a copper table to do the Accra Cake walk to perfection. The owner of the Duck was fined for cruelty, and so should the sellers of high heeled shoes for flat feet.” F. S. H., “A Tribute to Mr. Quist, Our Girls and European Dress,” Letter to Editor, *West Africa Times*, July 21, 1931, 2. “F. S. H.” was a British South African man who the *West Africa Times* reported on September 3, 1931 had taken up residence at Sekondi. He submitted letters to the paper on other occasions. In a letter to the *Times*, he suggested that the realm of economics, trade, and agriculture had been neglected by Africans in the Gold Coast. He recommended that “African patriots” focus on cultivating the land. “The Same Old Hoe,” *West Africa Times*, September 3, 1931, 2.

⁵⁵¹ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, September 1-2, 1931, 2. For additional discussions of fashion, see “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, August 6, September 3, October 8, 15-16, 1931. On February 13, 1932, she wondered what the “U.A.C. office girl” should wear for spring.

⁵⁵² “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, December 30, 1931. But European women in Accra were not always the example to follow. On October 26, 1931, “Marjorie” wrote about her horror in seeing a well-dressed European woman dressed in public without stockings. For a discussion of “frock women” in Mabel Dove’s short stories Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, “Recovering Lost Voices: the Short Stories of Mabel Dove-Danquah,” in *Writing African Women: Gender, Popular Culture and Literature in West Africa*, ed. Stephanie Newell (London: Zed Books, 1997), 74-5.

Naidu's mould" might rise to the challenge and help "lead popular opinion in the race that we [Africans] are about to run."⁵⁵³

"Marjorie's" movement between English and imperial images of womanhood, particularly on the subject of dress, reflect how this group was actively reconstituting what it meant to be an educated, "westernized," and "modern" African woman, man, and nation. The numerous newspaper articles critiquing "Europeanized" Africans and opposing acts of "mimicry" are evidence of educated Africans' negotiation of their identity as European educated African men and women in dialogue with colonial, traditional, international and imperial discourses.⁵⁵⁴ The solution to problems of mimicry and authenticity for this generation of educated Africans was to decolonize "Africa" by constituting a new African identity out of "world" resources, combining the very best of England, Africa, and the world to make the new African. "Marjorie" is one example of this process. The diverse and sometimes contrasting images of womanhood represented in the "Ladies' Corner" show these writers actively engaged in the process of decolonizing their identity as educated Africans—the identity they were forming in the *Times* would not be a replica of Europe, or any country or people, nor would it be the "old" "traditional" Africa. As European educated cosmopolitan African men and women, they used their European education and institutions to "think for themselves," to learn about Africa through their own anthropological and sociological research and to reveal the "truth" about Africa to the world through their books, journals, newspapers, and public lectures. Once Africans discovered the "truth" about their history and

⁵⁵³ She read about the Conference in the English newspaper the *Daily Mail*. "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, January 4, 1932, 2.

⁵⁵⁴ An article on the Society of African Patriots expresses concern for African's Eurocentrism. *West Africa Times*, February 19, 1932, 2.

customs, they would add lessons from the wide world of ideas, peoples, nations, and empires. They would use this knowledge to teach the world about the new Africa. As with the new African womanhood, the new Africa shared certain features in common with other “modern societies,” but was not a reproduction of those societies. This group was studying world history, focusing on England, whose accomplishments they claimed could not be denied, but also on the United States, Egypt, Turkey, India, South Africa, Canada, Japan, and Russia; and, like any “young” ambitious country, they were learning from the successes and failures of their elder “sisters” the Empire and the world.

At the same time that “Marjorie” was inventing a new type of African womanhood, she argued that Africa was also distinguishing itself from Europe, developing its own independent identity and culture. In *Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Mr. Shaw*, the updated heroine tells the Bishop,

The African today is fast becoming a thinker. He first started by loving everything associated with the Church. Today he is starting to judge those who are responsible for certain things which he has discovered to be wrong. It is useless to say to us today, that we must accept all doctrine nolens volens. We did all of this in the past. Our belief has led to our political enslavement today. We are in chains though men say we are free . . . It is time to be up and doing. We cannot walk through the fields of a neighbour and pluck his corn that we may eat.⁵⁵⁵

In other words, the new Africa would not be built upon “foreign conceits.” African men and women would challenge these “conceits” by conducting their own research of Africa’s history and present to the world the “true” Africa for themselves and for future generations.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ *Selected Writings of a Pioneer West African Feminist*, ed. Stephanie Newell and Audrey Gadzekpo (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004), 51.

⁵⁵⁶ “Marjorie Mensah,” *Times of West Africa*, March 7, 1932, 2.

“Marjorie Mensah’s” incorporation of imperial and world images of womanhood into her column allowed her to critique and reform educated Gold Coast womanhood, which at least until the First World War had been heavily influenced by conservative ideals of Victorian womanhood along the lines of John Ruskin’s portrayal of womanhood in his 1865 essay “Of Queen’s Garden,” published in *Sesame and Lillies*.⁵⁵⁷ Not wanting to abandon the image entirely, an image that had for several generations served the interests of West Africa’s coastal elite, “Marjorie” frequently indulged “women’s domestic nature,” busying herself and her readers with the task of making a home “like a home,” and declaring domesticity the “glory of womanhood.” She was eager to help her women readers balance their household budgets, discover new recipes, and dispense the right kind of moral guidance to their husbands and children.⁵⁵⁸ Women’s needlework was especially promising. It spared the household budget a few shillings on children’s clothing and could be used to “beautify” the home, which she feared women were neglecting.⁵⁵⁹ She told her readers that a woman’s home was her “looking glass.” A woman’s character could be “accurately determined from the mere get up of her room; the arrangement all suggest a certain taste, a certain temperament, a certain culture, a certain intellectual standard.” The “smart woman” is seldom, if ever, from a “slovenly

⁵⁵⁷ Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lillies: Three Lectures* (New York: John Wiley, 1883). Gold Coasters were reading *Sesame and Lillies* and debating it at their clubs during the 1930s. See Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: How to Play the Game of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 53-59.

⁵⁵⁸ In the first issue, written by Ruby Papafio, “Marjorie” wrote, “We women have to make the home like a home. Domesticity: the glory of womanhood should radiate in our countenance. The home is our sphere; it is where we rule; it was the charm of the home with which leander won the heart of the hero into a serene surrender.” Women were also interested in dancing and clothing. During its first year, the column continued to support this image of womanhood by dedicating several issues to cooking, parenting, and married life. “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, March 19, 1931, 2.

⁵⁵⁹ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, December 19, 1931, 2.

home;” intellect and tidiness “go hand in hand,” so she claimed.⁵⁶⁰ The smart woman also enjoyed “society” gossip, attended musical performances and dances, and kept up with the latest fashions from London and Paris.

Similar to Ruskin, “Marjorie” cautioned women against getting too caught up in “trivial feminine” pursuits. Unlike Ruskin, she argued that women should unleash themselves from the “unjustifiable restraint” of “convention that belonged to a different age.” She recommended that women devote their education and time to self help and social reform. For this, she turned to Mrs. Pankhurst, “the Niobe of the women’s movement in England and leader of that band of celebrated women patriots who were then known as suffragettes,” for advice. She wrote, “To-day, we in West Africa, must follow in the track that Pankhursts have beaten out for us with so much courage and fortitude; and demand our equal rights.” African women “shall not be contented to sleep on a mat on the floor any longer,” while their “lords and masters sleep in their beds as though they are made of different stuff.” She would no longer be confined to the “kitchen,” living vicariously through her husband and children, spending her days peering wishfully out of the windows of her home. The New Woman would assume her “correct roles as mistresses of the entire household,” and by this she meant her participation in “all matters of a social and public nature that affect the race.”⁵⁶¹

According to “Marjorie,” women were essential to national and racial progress. “Marjorie” argued that a young and ambitious country like the Gold Coast had many needs for smart women’s services and their help with social reform; it could not afford to have women of the highest training spending their days lounging in bed. She advised

⁵⁶⁰ “Marjorie Mensah,” *Times of West Africa*, March 2-3, 1932, 2.

⁵⁶¹ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, May 12, 1931, 2.

educated women to serve the needs of their country by showing their “industry and courageous ambition” as guardians of men’s and women’s morality, advocates of social reform and education, and as active contributors to the local economy. She suggested they focus their attention on the social and moral education of the less privileged members of Accra’s English-literate group. This, she argued, would improve the overall health and progress of educated society in the Gold Coast.

“Marjorie” believed that the Gold Coast was ready for this new kind of woman. She reported that when she returned from her education abroad, she found her country in the throes of change. The Gold Coast was not “what it was ten years ago,” she wrote. It had transformed itself, so much so that she had anticipated a woman to stand for election to the Legislative Council. There were plenty of qualified women in Accra, she argued, “women of the highest training: women who have been successful in business and women full of self-confidence . . .”⁵⁶² Though, she cautioned, the situation of women could always be improved. To her disappointment, she noticed that the ““Been to England girl”” was lately too much show—cliquey, egotistical, and full of “not very wise wit.”⁵⁶³ Their parents were too anxious to see them married to a “local professional” man, and this, she claimed, was a crime against the nation. The nation needed the best in intellect among its women to assist in “national work.”⁵⁶⁴

“Marjorie” argued that educated women, especially those who had been to England, needed to cultivate a “healthy attitude” towards their particular role in society’s advancement, taking lessons and drawing inspiration from African market women, the

⁵⁶² “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, September 11, 1931, 2.

⁵⁶³ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 11, 1931, 2.

⁵⁶⁴ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

“angels of the country,” and the hardworking and self-sacrificing “village girls,”⁵⁶⁵ and the politically active “women in India and Turkey.”⁵⁶⁶ Educated women could fulfill their own unique obligation to the Gold Coast by founding literary and social clubs, engaging social reform and political debates, and helping to educate their “illiterate sisters,” young girls and men, all of whom she believed were too easily lured by the glamour and glitter of “modernity.” Young women were especially vulnerable and needed strong role models. They received too little supervision from their parents and lacked a home life that would ensure their development into “useful and virtuous women.” “Marjorie” sympathized with these girls and their pursuit of the glamour, men, and a “modern” life-style. Girls and young women were understandably attracted to modernity, what “Marjorie” called that “darling jade,” its night clubs, cars, romance, cinema; and the valuable trinkets, costly dresses, silk stockings, and shoes that any girl would long to own. Exhausted by their pursuit of “empty dreams,” dances, picnics, and fleeting romance, many of Accra’s most promising young women returned to “society” several years later penniless and old, begging to be let back “in.”⁵⁶⁷ Educated women needed to warn these young girls before it was too late and the “excesses” of modernity had left them and the nation a future without hope.

“Marjorie” argued that education was the way forward for Accra’s young women. It would safeguard them against the pitfalls of modernity’s “other side.” According to the *Times*, women’s education was “to be regarded as a matter of national importance.”

⁵⁶⁵ On market women, see “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, May 7, 1931, 2. On the village girl, see “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, February 4, 1932, 2.

⁵⁶⁶ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

⁵⁶⁷ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, July 30, July 31-August 1, and August 4, 1931.

Advancements in women's education would ensure the "elevation and advancement" of society.⁵⁶⁸ According to "Marjorie," the new Gold Coast woman needed a new kind of education, one that moved beyond the drawing room, that impractical form of education associated with the "old days." The New Woman needed an education that would empower her with practical skills, paving her way to good jobs with salaries "suitable to their station," affording her to maintain a certain appearance in public (i.e., to buy work clothing and shoes without the help of a boyfriend or married man).⁵⁶⁹ Educated women could help promote this new form of education by founding a school similar to the Pitman's School in England, a woman-run night school for women that prepared women in bookkeeping, stenciling, domestic economics, and shorthand. Such a school, she wrote, would be a blessing to the Gold Coast and would enable women to "catch up" with European women, who she argued were actively competing with men in "nearly every walk of life."⁵⁷⁰ She saw women's entrance into the "world of affairs and business" as essential to national and racial progress.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁸ J.C.B.Z., cheered by Ester Stonewall Payne's letter in defense of Marjorie's identity as a woman on May 11, 1931, was inspired to write an article on women's sphere, which he believed extended into all realms of social life. Women, and women's education was essential to society's progress. He wrote, "The education of women is to be regarded as a matter of national importance. Not only does the moral character but the mental strength of man and their best safeguard and support in the moral purity and metal cultivation of woman, but the more completely the powers of both are developed, the more harmonious and well ordered will society be—the more safe and certain its elevation and advancement . . . Where she is debased, society is debased; where she is morally pure and enlightened, society will be proportionally elevated. . . For Nations are but the outcomes of Homes, and Peoples of Mothers." J.C.B.Z., "True Sphere of Women," *West Africa Times*, June 16, 1931.

⁵⁶⁹ She tempered her argument by noting that women's first responsibility was to her family. Her advice, she claimed, applied to unmarried women who she believed needed to earn a "respectable living."

⁵⁷⁰ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 15, 1931, 2. She also recommended an increase in women's salaries. Women working as clerks at the Post Office were earning three to five pounds per month. This salary was barely enough to keep young women above "want and mere struggle," causing some women to fall victim to men who offered to help them with the monthly expenses in exchange for sex.

⁵⁷¹ "Marjorie's" opinions on women's education and her description of women's occupational lives were likely influenced by Mabel Dove. Dove would have known about women's secretarial schools in England, and would have been inclined to suggest a similar kind of "practical" education for Gold Coast women. As

Curiously, though, “Marjorie” had a more conservative vision for girl’s education. She was a strong advocate of domestic training for girls, which she believed would prepare them for married life. She also encouraged girls to take a greater interest in the development of “African art,” which she deemed critical to national progress.⁵⁷² “Marjorie’s” opinions on girls’ education might have been influenced by Adelaide Casely Hayford, who was a strong proponent of vocational training for girls and co-founder of the Girls’ Vocational School in Freetown in 1924. The school was the outgrowth of Casely Hayford’s two-year tour of schools and universities in the United States. The curriculum was modeled after Moyamba Girls’ School of the UBC Mission and the Tuskegee Institute in the United States. The initial plans for the school included courses in domestic science “including laundry, cooking, housekeeping, hygiene, sanitation, child welfare,” music, dressmaking, “Native Arts and Crafts,” and teacher training—the type of curriculum “Marjorie” advocated for Gold Coast girls.⁵⁷³

Another critical aspect of women’s lives, and the place from which educated women could carry out their plans for social reform were literary and social clubs. “Marjorie” urged her gendered readers to participate actively in Accra’s club life. Cape Coast women had made great strides in this area. She noted that one of the oldest, if not

a clerk for European firms, she would also have been familiar with the “meager” salaries that women clerks were paid at this time as described by Marjorie on April 15, 1931. I suspect that this article was among the first of Dove’s writings published under the penname Marjorie Mensah. The April 15, 1931 issue on women’s education and employment represents the most driven social reform piece published under the penname before this date. April 9 (on a woman’s union) and 14 (on women and sport) are similar in tone and might be evidence of Mabel Dove becoming acquainted with the paper.

⁵⁷² “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 23, 1931, 2. A few days before her discussion of women and art, the paper reported on an exhibition of student handiwork and domestic science by the Wesleyan Girls’ High School in Accra. Students displayed their “cookery,” weaving, needlework, “housewifery,” and kenki and bread-making. “Hand Work Exhibition,” *West Africa Times*, April 18, 1931, 4.

⁵⁷³ It later included a teacher training course. The school closed in 1941. Adelaide M. Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford, 1868-1960* (London: F. Cass, 1986), 136-152.

the first women's club in the country was the Cape Coast Ladies Club. More recently, Cape Coast women were organizing a West African Women's Union that sought to encourage musical ability and reading, educate the public about "good health" and sanitation in the home, to better prepare girls for employment, and help improve the "physique of African womanhood," through sport. The club motto was "For Universal Uplift."⁵⁷⁴

"Marjorie" encouraged Accra women to create a similar kind of club to promote positive images for young people, and combat the pitfalls of "civilization" including prostitution that she judged to be on the rise. A women's club in Accra could stop the daily arrival of young girls from "very remote parts" of the country, places like Krachi and Nkonua in the Upper Volta into Accra for prostitution. As the demand for their services increased, local city women and women from the "progressive states" were joining the "ranks as well." She accused older women of luring young girls into the trade with promises of future rewards that never materialized, and of rounding them up from the country districts, dressing them in fancy prints "of a very gaudy pattern," silk headscarves, "some good brass earrings," and the latest sandal or full slipper. After whispering a "few hints" in their ears, women sent their "young debutants" to "walk the streets all night." And this, while the virtuous women of Accra slept soundly in their beds! "Marjorie" assured her readers that they were not alone. Equally respectable women in other countries were facing similar problems. Just the other day, the *Reynold's Illustrated News* ran a story on a similar situation taking place in Uruguay. Fortunately, the Women's Auxiliary Service, which had been visiting South America for a Feminist

⁵⁷⁴ Emma C. Barnes, Letter to "Marjorie Mensah," *West Africa Times*, August 12, 1931, 3.

Conference, was present to offer the people of Uruguay advice. In a speech at the Conference, Miss Allen mentioned the “depraved condition of a particular class of women,” some voluntary and some by force. The “horrors of white slavery” were discussed, and stress was placed on the government to help solve the problem by providing education for women. As a result of their conference, fewer women were walking the streets at night. Gold Coast women could learn from their success. She wrote, “We can do the same thing here; and I appeal to the authorities to institute a corps of Women Constabulary to cope with the evil situation at once.”⁵⁷⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century, prostitution had taken on an international dimension as the practice of exporting young girls from the imperial centers to colonial brothels became increasingly common. Educated Bourgeois women from Great Britain, Europe and the Americas had long occupied themselves with the “problem” of prostitution.⁵⁷⁶ Some of the early international alliances that formed in response to the traffic in women and children were the Union Internationale des Amies de la Jeune Fille in 1887 and the International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children in 1899. Some of the women who formed part of these groups were also involved in the League of Nations Committee against the Traffic in Women and Children that held several conferences during the first half of the twentieth century.⁵⁷⁷ Prostitution and the traffic in women and children stimulated the formation of an issue network.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁵ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies Corner,” *West Africa Times*, November 20, 1931, 2.

⁵⁷⁶ See Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) and *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁵⁷⁷ Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women. The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 150-152.

⁵⁷⁸ Frederick Cooper discusses the networks and circuits through which people form local, regional, continental and transcontinental. He discusses border crossing “issue networks” “of which the anti-slavery

Both were issues of concern that had the capacity to bring people together from different parts of the world, offering numerous connection points and facilitating exchange across social and political boundaries.

“Marjorie’s” concerns about prostitution, as her reference to the Women’s Auxiliary Service indicates, was, therefore, not unique.⁵⁷⁹ For “Marjorie,” though, the concern was less about tapping into this particular international network of women activists. Her primary interest lay in the discussion of the problem, an act that was itself a sign of her (West Africans) engagement in “modern” social problems. By talking about prostitution and finding solutions in the press, “Marjorie” illustrated educated West Africans’ ability to manage all aspects of national and social life for African, English, and world audiences—a performance that was critical to the educated elites’ argument for self-government. “Marjorie’s” discussion of prostitution and the traffic of young girls in the press, her creators believed, added to the “civility” and urbanity of her womanhood and of her country. Her discourse on prostitution showed her as an urban African woman living in “modern” times and facing “modern” (that might also have been described as urban) problems, and as a woman of respectability and civility finding solutions to those problems. By suggesting solutions similar to those being implemented by the Women’s

movement of the early nineteenth century was the great pioneer.” Frederick Cooper, “What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian’s Perspective,” *African Affairs* 100, 388 (2001): 209-10. From men’s and women’s engagement with various “issues,” the traffic in women and children, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and the Scottsboro trial they encountered new people and ideas, new discursive strategies, resources and languages which could lead to the development of new identities, subjectivities, political futures.

⁵⁷⁹ Uruguay joined one of the three major international women’s organizations, the International Alliance of Women, in 1920 along with Argentina and Brazil. A number of colonial territories joined the movement around the same time, including India (1923), Ireland (1923), Jamaica (1923), Ceylon (1929), Rhodesia (1929), and Dutch West Indies (1929). “South West Africa” joined the International Council of Women in 1938. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 16-18.

Auxiliary Service, Gold Coast women were asserting their civilization and control over women's morality and demonstrating the modernity of Gold Coast Africans.

In addition to forming their own clubs where women could devote their time and energy to "women's work," "Marjorie" suggested they also contribute to debates and activities of the primary mixed-gender clubs (though predominately men's clubs), including the Rodger Club, the Optimist Literary Society, and the Young People's Literary Club. Accra's club life was the foundation upon which the new age would emerge and women needed to be part of it. After attending a lecture by "a certain lawyer" on the topic of "The New Age," "Marjorie" was disappointed to see so few women in attendance. Absent were the "flashy female crowd, who are supposed to be 'it.'" Perhaps they were too busy indulging in dance and revelry. She hoped not. Women needed to speak up; otherwise the new age would be the usual "masculine—prosaic material industrial emancipation" which she claimed many educated men were fond of.⁵⁸⁰

"Marjorie" opposed this vision for the future of Africa. A masculine future was unacceptable, she argued, especially in light of the fact that people in other parts of the world were beginning to recognize the political and social value of women. According to "Marjorie," African women needed to push their way into the "'inner circles'" of Accra political scene.⁵⁸¹ The Ladies' Section of the National Congress of British West Africa, which had successfully placed a couple of "material issues" onto the party's platform, was only the beginning of women's foray into the world of politics. She argued that women could no longer be "contented to make [themselves] the organisers of dances

⁵⁸⁰ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, April 17, 1931, 2.

⁵⁸¹ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, September 11, 1931, 2.

merely for the purpose of collecting money to assist the parent body that is represented by our men folk.” She urged women to make up their “minds to follow the rest of the world” by making their own contribution to the formation of a “great national body capable of asserting” influence over the “political life” of the country.⁵⁸² She also hoped that women would continue their clubbing after marriage, which would allow all women to “keep abreast with the times,” which she argued was “essential now-a-days.” Married women, like their husbands, ought to remain connected to their clubs. After all, she wrote, “the European girl never divorces herself from her club life though she may marry—and we must do the same.”⁵⁸³

But modernity was not all work for women. There was room for romance in what she called “our new world” where “everything around us—the cars, the dances and parties, even the daily round of business—calls for romance, a new way of love.”⁵⁸⁴ Love and marriage was especially important area of concern for “Marjorie” as it brought every aspect of social life into a single frame—gender, sexuality, family, and nation. Like most elite coastal women at this time, “Marjorie” supported monogamous companionate marriages formed out of “love” between a man and a woman, over customary marriage based on agreements between families.⁵⁸⁵ If the Gold Coast was going to accept a single form of marriage, and, according to “Marjorie” it should, the

⁵⁸² “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, December 24, 1931, 2.

⁵⁸³ Her comments were in reference to a recently married woman member of the Young Ladies’ Musical Society. “Marjorie” feared that this woman’s marriage would prevent her from being part of the club. She worried that matrimony in general threatened the continuation of this “little club of real down fine ambitious girls.” If married women felt compelled to leave club life, “Marjorie” suggested they at least make an occasional appearance at their old clubs, to see how things were progressing and to keep in touch. Mabel Dove was a member of the Ladies’ Musical Society. “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, November 7, 1931, 2.

⁵⁸⁴ “Marjorie Mensah,” *Times of West Africa*, July 13, 1932, 2.

⁵⁸⁵ Mann, *Marrying Well*.

companionate form of marriage was the right form for a young Africa. Accepting this new form, however, would require young people's learning a new way of love and romance; they could no longer rely on their families to find them a partner, and in this "new world," the teachings of the church were not enough. In their quest for advice, "Marjorie" worried that young people were in danger of turning to Hollywood, learning the "fleeting" kind of love that ended in divorce, or worse, pre-marital sex. According to "Marjorie," this "false" kind of love jeopardized women's standing in society; it threatened to spoil her good reputation, and, in turn, the good reputation of the New Africa these writers were striving to create.

Accra's young readers could find a devoted teacher in "Marjorie" who promised to give them a solid education in "true" and "lasting" love. In her effort to educate her readers she introduced numerous urban figures into the "Ladies' Corner"—for women, the promiscuous school girl, the "modern" nightclub-going woman, and the gold digger; and, for men, the slim dreadful, the heartthrob, and the grasshopper. She used these figures to spin moral tales designed to teach young people sexual morality, respectability, and "modern" love and marriage (the cornerstone of the nation). "Marjorie" blamed parents for turning a blind eye to the sexual activities of school girls and the "grasshoppers"—young men who jump from one romance to the next, that she claimed wooed young women into pre-marital sexual relationships. These men plied women them with sweet promises of love and marriage, and left them several months later pregnant, alone, and "ruined" for society. These men were a serious "menace," and not only to "feminine" society, but the future welfare of the nation. Their reckless romances threatened to ruin otherwise respectable women's reputations and, according to

“Marjorie,” simply had to stop. Men needed to adopt a more level headed approach to love, taking time and care to select a “suitable” woman companion of his background and education who would remain loyal to him, help him in his career, and maintain a stable home environment for their children.

“Marjorie’s” comments on young men’s sexual behavior were possibly veiled critiques of the Colony’s dual system of marriage and young men’s tendency to use the dual system to their advantage, marrying according to both customary and colonial law at different life stages and as it suited their changing needs.⁵⁸⁶ Her portrayal of these men as womanizers or gigolos enabled her (and the group she represented) to strategically misrecognize these young men’s creative negotiation of the dual system. Instead of acknowledging the challenges they faced, as well as the benefits they gained through their negotiation of the dual system, she urged them to abandon their “womanizing” and commit to one woman and one form of marriage—the monogamous companionate form associated with Europe, civilization, and Christianity. This form of marriage, she argued, was the best form for Gold Coast Africans and would ensure the country’s development into a “civilized” and “modern” nation.

Reader Response

“Marjorie Mensah,” both loved and despised, quickly achieved local fame with African and European readers, many of whom used “Marjorie” to advance their own

⁵⁸⁶ Stephan Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).

social and political agendas. Her column was considered a witty, intelligent, and often controversial read that some readers at least claimed to turn to before attending to the day's front page news.⁵⁸⁷ Elite African women and men were especially fond of "Marjorie." One women reader, Ester Stonewall Payne, described "Marjorie" as ahead of her time and the first sign of progress in female education on the Coast. "Marjorie" was proof that "some of the ladies out here have wit enough to express their minds as equally as the men if not better." Stonewall Payne admired the "frankness of her jotting, her modesty coupled with her sense of judgment."⁵⁸⁸ Another reader exclaimed that her "sweet style of diction as a woman is to me above the par," and her "uncanny ingenuity" had enabled her to achieve "a thing, which, it is understood, is unprecedented in the history of journalism in the Gold Coast, if not West Africa."⁵⁸⁹

Non-elite readers, like Jane Prah, looked to "Marjorie" to speak on their behalf. Prah sent a letter to the *Times* asking for "Marjorie's" help with men who beat their wives. She wrote, "Being a girl with a weak pen, I cannot express what I want to say forcibly, and I leave the matter in the hands of Miss Marjorie Mensah to help me with her forceful pen."⁵⁹⁰ Other readers were enticed by the content of her column, her opinions of women's education, advice to parents, concerns about school girls, and criticisms of romance and courtship. They used "Marjorie" as an opportunity to present their own ideas on social reform. Her many discussions of "immoral" women who she claimed drank, smoked, and "acted modern" by going to dances and having affairs with men led

⁵⁸⁷ Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*.

⁵⁸⁸ Ester Stonewall Payne, "A Woman Speaks Out, A Real Name at Last," Letter to the Editor, *West Africa Times*, May 11, 1931, 4.

⁵⁸⁹ "Letter to the Editor," *West Africa Times*, April 24, 1931.

⁵⁹⁰ Jane Prah, "A Future Wife and Men Who Beat Wives," Letter to the Editor, *West Africa Times*, November 2, 1931, 3.

to a series of letters by African men on “women in society.”⁵⁹¹ Reader Kodjo Kennely agreed with “Marjorie’s” assessment, stating that he too was outraged by young women’s behavior in the streets, especially the “young girls” who spent their evenings smoking cigarettes at Bukum Square, Zion Street and Bannerman Road.⁵⁹² He urged parents and women of the town to help restore social order by increasing their supervision of young women.⁵⁹³ Reader Mr. Re Sumo-Attoquayfio also agreed, single women’s behavior was disturbing the “home life and moral fabric” of the country; however, he did not believe that women and parents had the power to reform these young women. He recommended the Provincial Council of African chiefs be consulted on the issue.⁵⁹⁴ In response to this suggestion, reader Ayehfio Okai submitted a letter in which he argued that the local clubs and meetings were better suited to lead reform in this area than the Provincial Council, and he believed that women like “Marjorie” were an important part of the solution.⁵⁹⁵ Readers felt compelled to engage with “Marjorie Mensah.” Some readers used “Marjorie” and her opinions to advance their own ideas about social life, while others

⁵⁹¹ “Marjorie Mensah,” *Times of West Africa*, April 11, 1933, 2.

⁵⁹² The issue of young girls in the streets was discussed by Marjorie in her column of March 28, 1933.

⁵⁹³ Kodjo Kennely, “Is There No Balm in Gilead,” Letter to the Editor, *Times of West Africa*, April 28, 1933.

⁵⁹⁴ Re Sumo-Attoquayfio, “Letter to “Marjorie Mensah,”” *Times of West Africa*, April 11, 1933. Mr. Attoquayfio is mentioned as a speaker at Miss Ruby Papafio’s lecture on “Sacrifice” to the Young People’s Literary Club at James Town. The paper noted that “a very select and well attended gathering of persons with very pronounced literary tastes” were present. Papafio gave an interesting and intelligent lecture. She urged members to make more sacrifices, men and women, for the national progress. She offered examples of women’s sacrifice, referencing Florence Nightingale who gave up her life of comfort for the wounded soldiers in the Crimean war and suffered through a hard Russian winter. Nurse Edith Cavell also gave her life for King and country in Flanders, and Grace Darling saved many from perishing. Not everyone agreed with her method of sacrifice, though they agreed some sacrifice was needed to realize a national ideal. Miss Lerina Bright of Achimota College occupied the Chair and made a few brief remarks about the lecture. Among the speakers: Rev. Persico, Mr. Ward, Mr. John Buckman, M.B.E., Mr. (rev.) Quartey, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Re Sumo Attoquayfio. *West Africa Times*, March 4, 1932. He also appears as a member of the continuation committee for the Gold Coast Youth Conference of 1938. He was a lawyer. The Youth Conference, *First Steps towards a National Fund* (Accra, Ghana: The Continuation Committee, Gold Coast Youth Conference, 1938), 27.

⁵⁹⁵ Ayehfio Okai, “Women in Society,” Letter to the Editor, *Times of West Africa*, April 28, 1933.

lobbied her to focus on issues that concerned them. Through their letters they not only responded to “Marjorie,” but also to each other as they worked through different solutions to social issues.

Europeans in the Gold Coast and England also took an interest, albeit at times patronizing, in “Marjorie.” In April 1931, Miss Percy told the paper’s editor, “I have read the various newspapers you sent [to me in England], and found them very interesting. “Marjorie Mensah’s” contributions always amuse me because the author uses such flowery language, and is so obviously pleased with herself.”⁵⁹⁶ And, in 1933, an English writer, Kathleen Hewitt,⁵⁹⁷ wrote in her autobiography that her days in the Gold Coast (where she was living with her husband while he worked on the final construction of the Takoradi Harbor) were enlivened by “Marjorie Mensah,” who she thought to be a “fervent feminist” owing to her frequent expressions of scorn “for the masculine sex.”

Hewitt was taken with “Marjorie’s” description of men as nothing more than ““species of

⁵⁹⁶ “A Criticism from Leicester” “A correspondent has shown me a copy of a letter from Miss Barbara Percy of Leicester who is apparently a reader of the *Times*. “Zadig,” “A Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, April 8, 1933, 2.

⁵⁹⁷ Hewitt is a fascinating study in the ways imperialism impacted the life histories of some English women. She was born in a “bungalow” in Darjeeling, high in the Himalayas. In the 1880s, her mother traveled to India to work for the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society where she “exerted great efforts for the women of India, being eager to see the abolition of child marriages—those farcical ceremonies whereby little girls could be married to doddering old men.” She believed her mother had “the spirit of Katherine Mayo and was truly great, though her achievements were never blazed before the public.” Hewitt, *The Only Paradise*, 5. Her mother was from a modest background and her father was a clergyman. Her family returned to England when Hewitt was still a girl. Her brother moved to Canada to “seek his fortune,” and as a young woman she moved to London where she worked as an actress, sat for portraits at a local art school, and sold her fashion drawings to newspapers and magazines on Fleet Street. She followed a man to South Africa where she lived for four years after which she worked as a tour guide to Americans in Paris. At the end of the 1920s, she followed her second husband to the Gold Coast where he had found employment as a worker on the Takoradi Harbour. She found life on the Gold Coast tedious; most Europeans spent their time abroad the ships, drinking and having fun. All the men in her life brought her additional hardships. Her first love was a cocaine addict and the man she followed to South Africa was addicted to gambling. She was a prolific writer and published numerous novels including *Mardi* (1932), *A Pattern in Yellow* (1932), *Strange Salvation* (1934), *Comedian* (1943), *Fetish* (1933), *A Modern Satire* (1935), *Go Find a Shadow* (1937), *The House by the Canal* (1938), *The Gold Milestone* (1939), and many more into the 1950s. In 1939, she published an article on married couples which focused on a jealous husband who decides to throw his wife out of his house. “Married Love,” *Lilliput the Pocket Magazine for Everyone* 5, 2, Love Number (August 1939), 195-198.

octopi,” and young elegant men as “‘slim dreadfuls,’ who were ‘very menacing to feminine society.’” She adored “Marjorie’s” advice to “generous and unsuspecting” women, the way she warned them, “‘Girls, we must indeed be very careful,’” and her foretelling of “the happy day when African men would be ‘as terrified as the other races are of their emancipated women.’” Hewitt, who was pursuing a career as a novelist, and was a self-proclaimed feminist, thought it a “pity” that this “ardently feminine column” should have “so limited a circulation.”⁵⁹⁸ When Hewitt returned from the colonies, she reprinted edited selections from the column as a book *Us Women*, published in London in 1933, hoping that through the book’s publication, British women would take notice of this new brand of feminism emerging in the West African colonies.⁵⁹⁹

Us Women included “Marjorie’s” own account of herself in which she provides a different set of goals, and a much more modest picture of herself and her accomplishments as a writer. She declared herself a “mere scribbler” whose only aim was to “bring African women more into the limelight than they have been in the past,” and “to enlist more interest and sympathy from outside on their behalf.” She “trusted” women in England to read her views “dispassionately and without prejudice.” She added that none “had been inspired through any ill feeling,” but were simply her “own conscientious opinion of men, matters, and things” as they came to her as she walked “abroad and mingle[d]” with “with busy mankind in this wonderful theatre of action, so peculiarly chequered [sic], ordered, and sustained.”⁶⁰⁰ The “extracts” from articles selected for the book were taken from a small number of “Marjorie’s” articles, and were

⁵⁹⁸ Hewitt, *The Only Paradise*, 135.

⁵⁹⁹ Marjorie Mensah and Kathleen Hewitt, *Us Women*, (London: E. Mathews & Marrot Ltd, 1933).

⁶⁰⁰ Mensah and Hewitt, *Us Women*, 9.

de-contextualized and repackaged into sixty-eight short “chapters” with snappy and provocative titles such as “Menacing Men,” “Men are sadly ignorant,” “Perpetual Orgling’s,”⁶⁰¹ “Up and Doing,” “Ah, Take the Cash,” “This Freedom,” “Employers,” “Emotional Control,” “Love, Hair, or Cash?,” “Perfume,” and “Lovely Undies.” The chapters covered a range of topics—men, women, love, work, education, domestic life, clothing and style, but in her forward, Hewitt focused her readers’ attention on “Marjorie’s” discussions of men as perpetual womanizers, reflecting Hewitt’s opinion that “Us” women’s common bane—African and European—were men.⁶⁰² Hewitt lamented that the “heart-throb” was still in fashion in “north and south,” and “beneath skins both white and brown.” And, as “Miss Marjorie so truly says, THIS IS NOT AN AGE OF FRIVOLITY.” For far too long, Hewitt declared, the Europeans had been offered the white man’s views on the “subject of the dusky enchantress.” The tale was always the same: “the hero—blue-blooded, public-schooled, varsity-veneered—finds himself among the mangoes and coconuts. He is a White Man, but a Waster!” Soon he finds himself “ensnared” by an African “lady” swinging “on a rope of hibiscus flowers” or wagging “a beaded hip.” After failing “to Play The Game, he sheds a basinfull [sic] of tears over his Old School Tie. Alas, alas!” “Marjorie’s” insights presented an

⁶⁰¹ Probably “ogling.” In this chapter, Marjorie wrote about a man standing at the soda fountain drinking his glass of beer and “orgling, winking and taking his chance as if it were a matter of life and death.” Mensah and Hewitt, *Us Women*, 29.

⁶⁰² Additional work needs to be done on the overlap between *Us Women* and the “Marjorie Mensah” column. I have only been able to identify sections from Marjorie’s issue on May 1, 1931. The article was originally a critique of the dual marriage system. Selections from this article that addressed men were separated into different chapters, “Menacing Men” and “The Old Old Story.” Sections on native and European forms of marriage and the dual system influencing men’s behavior were omitted from *Us Women*. The excerpts were de-contextualized, and presented an inaccurate picture of the original article. I suspect that other sixty-eight chapters resulted from a similar process. In the forward to the book, Hewitt reported that “Marjorie” dispensed advice on issues other than heterosexual relationships that included discussions of employment, lingerie, snobbery, and education. Hewitt stressed that “Marjorie’s” most interesting advice pertained to love and men. Mensah and Hewitt, *Us Women*, 7.

“authentic African-eye view” of a “particular type of White Man” in the colonies. Hewitt was certain that no “true woman” would “scan these extracts without wiping a tear of sympathy—or at any rate, a tear—from her eye.” Hewitt was certain that women of “every hue” would find “invaluable hints on their conduct towards the ‘male specie,’ who, as “Marjorie” so truly complains, are ‘as slippery as eels.’”⁶⁰³

“Marjorie” was equally taken with Kathleen Hewitt, who she claimed to know through their personal correspondence and through reading Hewitt’s “charming books, *Mardi*, and *Fetish*.”⁶⁰⁴ “Marjorie” was “extremely flattered” by all the attention she had received from “distinguished quarters.” It showed the world that “we can all do a great deal and that there are people, if not in Africa, Outside Africa who have kindly feelings towards us and intrinsically believe that there is something in Africa;” a slap in the face to the “cynics and the snobs” who think otherwise.⁶⁰⁵ The book was a real sign of progress—the “first occasion on which an African and a European woman have collaborated.”⁶⁰⁶

“Zadig” was also fond of Hewitt’s writing, though he was disappointed that her book *Fetish*, which had been recently reviewed in *West Africa*, gave “scarcely anybody or any part of the lives of the Coasters . . . even a word of ‘sweet mouth.’” Nevertheless, he found both her novels, *Mardi* and *Fetish*, to be gripping and absorbing.⁶⁰⁷ Both were

⁶⁰³ Mensah and Hewitt, *Us Women*, 5-6.

⁶⁰⁴ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Women’s Corner,” *Times of West Africa*, November 28, 1933, 2. Italics added.

⁶⁰⁵ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Women’s Corner,” *Times of West Africa*, November 3, 1933, 2.

⁶⁰⁶ “Publisher’s Notice,” *Times of West Africa*, November 30, 1933, 3.

⁶⁰⁷ “Zadig,” “Diary of a Man About Town,” *Times of West Africa*, November 17, 1933, 2. Not everyone was fond of Hewitt’s work. Wynyard Browne for the *London Mercury* described *Fetish* as “rather dull,” or to be “more exact the first 108 pages.” Hewitt provided little or no information about the main characters in her story, Vanessa and Martin, who are sailing to the Gold Coast. In the final pages of the book, “Miss Hewitt wakes up and sets about the real business of the book which is to draw a parallel between Martin’s love for Vanessa and the fetish-worship of the Gold Coast negroes.” Wynyard Browne,

curious to see the book's illustrations of African women by Elise Lindsley-Sims, an "artist of repute in London and Paris."⁶⁰⁸ "Marjorie" wondered if Lindsley-Sims had portrayed African women "as a new race of Amazons trumpeting our cause or Lady Astors, to be modern, standing on a modern platform doing modern things."⁶⁰⁹ "Zadig" wanted to see how a "Parisian artist" would interpret "in line and brush" an "African lady's writing."⁶¹⁰ Most likely to their disappointment, the illustrations depicted African women as voluptuous with exaggerated features dressed in lingerie and tight clothing reminiscent of Josephine Baker posters and postcards popular at this time.⁶¹¹ One illustration showed a naked African woman being adored by two men in top hats under the caption, "As for me, I simply adore love."⁶¹² Other, less derogatory images, showed African women in business suits and European-style dresses.

"Marjorie" had certainly made an impression on readers of "every hue," though not everyone was as ready to celebrate her new womanhood. Some readers argued that "she," "Marjorie," was actually a "he"—a clever "pet" used by men writers at the *Times* to float a particular image of the Gold Coast, an image that they deemed an elite fantasy.

"Fiction," *London Mercury* 29, XXIX, November 1933-April 1934, 269. The *Times of London* gave *Fetish* a more favorable review than the *Mercury*. While Hewitt's characters were underdeveloped, her "story rings true"—the tragedy of the "modern girl" with beauty and brains, Vanessa. The *Times* applauded her "studied avoidance of exaggeration" in her description of the West Coast of Africa. She paints a depressing, but "accurate" picture of the white man's life there, of men living in "a hellish climate, poorly paid, and occupied with monotonous drudgery." Not all men live "tragically," but they do come to live "meanly," seeking "relief from sheer boredom in gin and native women." Hewitt shows that the "lot of white women is even harder." *Times of London*, October 31, 1933, 7d.

⁶⁰⁸ "Important Announcement. Well Known London Firm to Issue the Works of Marjorie Mensah in Book Form," *Times of West Africa*, November 2, 1933, 1. Elise Lindsley-Sims also illustrated Clifford Kent Wright's edited collection of "peculiar" writings on Marriage. *Men, Women and Marriage. A Peculiar Anthology*. Selected and arranged by C. K. Wright with illustrations by Elise Lindsley-Sims (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1939).

⁶⁰⁹ "Marjorie Mensah," "Women's Corner," *Times of West Africa*, November 3, 1933, 2.

⁶¹⁰ "Zadig," "Diary of a Man About Town," *Times of West Africa*, November 6, 1933, 2.

⁶¹¹ Phyllis Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra Josephine Baker in Her Time* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), 25, 118

⁶¹² Mensah and Hewitt, *Us Women*, 98.

These readers, many of whom were locally-educated African men, doubted any woman's ability to write in a "masculine" tone—forceful and free of the emotional outbursts to which they believed all women were prone to. Many saw "Marjorie" as a mirage full of false hope—a distortion of reality that complicated their own lives and plans for social reform. They found her representation of reformed womanhood too "lofty" and out of touch with the reality of Gold Coast women. They were not alone in their doubt; European men were equally suspicious. *Time and Tide* magazine, a "feminist" magazine that catered to white middle class women in England, doubted that an African woman wrote the articles that appeared in *Us Women*. They alleged Kathleen Hewitt wrote "the naïve articles" and published the book as a kind of "literary joke."⁶¹³ Richard Sunne, the author of the column "Men and Books" for *Time and Tide* wrote,

These essays profess to be extracts from articles contributed to a Gold Coast paper by Miss Marjorie Mensah; but I am suspicious about their authenticity. At any rate, the author has read *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*; and with natural pride is prepared to boast a false one.⁶¹⁴

The *London Mercury* described "Marjorie" as an African woman "striving towards European sophistication." The paper could find no reason why the book should have been published in England, which it claimed read "like a curious blend of *The Young Visitors* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* with the humour left out." And, the author's

⁶¹³ Hewitt was eventually able to prove to the magazine that she was not the author of excerpts which were published in the book. Hewitt, *The Only Paradise*, 135. *Time and Tide* was established on May 14 1920 in London by Lady Margaret Rhondda. It was considered a "feminist" magazine which involved mainly white middle class women. It published many pieces by many famous writers including Virginia Woolf. Catherine Clay, *British Women Writers, 1914-1945: Professional Work and Friendship* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2006).

⁶¹⁴ Richard Sunne, "Men and Books," *Time and Tide*, December 30, 1933, 1601.

“preoccupation with sex” didn’t make the book any more compelling.⁶¹⁵ Ultimately Hewitt was able to prove to her accusers that the material was authentic or, rather, she was able to prove that she was not the author. She had received many letters from “Marjorie” over the book’s publication as well as additional manuscripts, including “a parody which [“Marjorie”] called *The Black Girl in Her Search for Bernard Shaw*” and “a kind of *White Cargo* play called *Gone Native*” that “was unique in showing the white-man-black girl situation through the eyes of a coloured writer.”

Shortly after *Stewart v. the Guinea Times* in May 1934, “Marjorie Mensah” sent Hewitt another letter, this time a “veritable *cri de cœur* confessing that “she” was no female, but a West Indian native living on the Gold Coast.” And so for Hewitt, “Marjorie became Kenneth.” Just as Hewitt was pondering whether she ought to break the news to her publisher, J. B. Danquah called on Alan McGaw of Nicholson and Watson to explain that he was “Marjorie Mensah’s” husband.⁶¹⁶ “Now the plot was really turgid,” and Hewitt’s “imagination wasn’t elastic enough to visualize the medical African as the husband of the West Indian Kenneth.” Of course, Danquah was referring to his wife at that time, Mabel Dove, who the court had determined was in fact the author of the majority of the extracts that appeared in *Us Women*. “Ultimately it transpired that The Ladies’ Corner was a composite feature.” When Hewitt sent her initial letter to “Marjorie Mensah” suggesting a book, the “contributor of the moment,” Kenneth MacNeill Stewart,

⁶¹⁵ Belles-Lettres—II, *London Mercury* 29, V. XXIX (Nov. 1933-Apr. 1934), 377.

⁶¹⁶ *Us Women* was published by Elkin Mathews and Marrot, Ltd., 44 Essex Street, Strand, WC2, London, England in November 1933. It is possible that the company changed its name. In her autobiography, Hewitt recalled Danquah calling on Alan McGaw of Nicholson and Watson, Essex Street, London. She wrote, “Publishers often have strange visitors, but even so Dr. Danquah must have been a unique event in Essex Street.” Hewitt, *The Only Paradise*, 136.

replied.⁶¹⁷ “Thus veiled, the West Indian wanted to pursue the advantage of being in touch with London publishing circles, and to further his personal ambitions he had delayed in revealing his sex.”⁶¹⁸ Having failed at his attempt to see his work published in London, Stewart published at least one of the manuscripts, *The Black Girl in Her Search for Bernard Shaw*, under the penname “Marjorie Mensah” in the *Times of West Africa* during his employment as the acting editor in 1934. The *White Cargo* play entitled *Gone Native* referred to by Hewitt is probably the play *A Woman in Jade* (published in the women’s column of the *Times of West Africa* between November 7 and December 31, 1934). The play is a response to Leon Gordon’s *White Cargo; A Play of the Primitive* published in 1925 and released as a film in England in 1930.⁶¹⁹

“In this Marjorie Mensah age”⁶²⁰

As “Marjorie” noted, “all civilized countries” had educated women, and the more progressive of them ensured women’s right to vote and participate in public life. To act otherwise was to indulge “barbarism and ignorance.”⁶²¹ “Marjorie” and the images of Africa she created daily were proof of Africa’s (men’s) civilization and progress. In this

⁶¹⁷ As confirmed by the court case, Stewart’s role as editor was to handle all correspondence to and from Marjorie Mensah. The correspondence between Stewart and Hewitt probably began sometime between the summer of 1931 and the summer/early fall of 1933. The book was released in London in November 1933. Shaw’s *Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God* was released in London in December 1932. Stewart probably sent his manuscripts to Hewitt between its release and April/May 1934.

⁶¹⁸ Hewitt, *The Only Paradise*, 136.

⁶¹⁹ Leon Gordon, *White Cargo; A Play of the Primitive* (Boston: Four Seas Co, 1925). The play is based on based on the book *Hell’s Playground* by Ida Vera Simonton (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co, 1912). The sound version of *White Cargo* was based on Gordon’s play and directed by J. B. Williams. It was released in Great Britain by Neo Art Productions in 1930. A silent version was released the same year.

⁶²⁰ “Zadig” used the phrase to describe women’s progress. “Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, May 5, 1931, 2.

⁶²¹ “Inferiority of the woman is the offshoot of barbarism and ignorance.” Reverend Ernest Bruce, “Public Debate at the Young People’s Club. A Review,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 23, 1931, 650.

“Marjorie Mensah age,” women were submitting letters to the newspapers and young girls were proving themselves the “darlings” of the British Empire—English educated, well-mannered, prim and pressed, and simply adorable—“just as they ought to be.”⁶²² Ambitious choral societies “composed entirely of women” were staging public dances at the “most exclusive but popular African Club in town.”⁶²³ On April 1, 1931, “Marjorie” recounted a conversation she had with a “European lady” from “a midland family of repute” at the local Kingsway department store. After they exchanged a few words, “Marjorie” told her that she worked for a newspaper. The European lady expressed surprise; she had been told by another European lady on the coast that “African women were perfectly horrid and commonplace with no intelligence and that she had believed” this woman “until the lucky incident” of their meeting. “Marjorie” was proud to report that she had left the European lady with “a different impression of African-womanhood.”⁶²⁴ Speaking to the Optimist Literary Club, J. B. Danquah, less than one month after having helped invent “Marjorie Mensah,” told the club, “there is no sex problem on the Gold Coast, at least not to the same extent as it exists in England.”⁶²⁵ He could point to the strong voiced “Marjorie” as proof of his assessment; the Gold Coast, at least in terms of gender equality, was not only keeping pace with England, but surpassing it.

“Marjorie” was the New Woman heroine of the “Ladies’ Corner.” She demanded women’s equality with men and defended Africa against the inequalities and injustices of

⁶²² “Marjorie Mensah,” *Times of West Africa*, April 25, 1932, 2.

⁶²³ “Zadig,” “Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, May 5, 1931, 2.

⁶²⁴ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 1, 1931, 2.

⁶²⁵ Asuana Quartey, Letter to the Editor, *West Africa Times*, April 21, 1931.

colonialism and racism.⁶²⁶ She was an anti-colonial argument; men's response to colonial constructions of Africa as a primitive and uncivilized continent. She was at the heart of this group's political project to demand equality for Africans within the British Empire. Through "Marjorie," the *Times* projected an educated and civilized Africa capable of self-government. An important assumption, therefore, underlined their construction of modern womanhood in "Marjorie"—if African women were educated people capable of citizenship, African men would also have to be recognized by Britain as capable of self-government. And, if to be a "modern" society was also to be a "civilized" society, why were modern and civilized Africans being denied their right to political autonomy and self-governance? This is, in part, the logic that gave rise to "Marjorie Mensah," and fueled the *Times*'s passionate defense of her identity as a woman.

"Marjorie" was not the first African woman heroine invented by an African man. In 1927, a law student from the Gold Coast, possibly J. B. Danquah, published a short story in the London-based magazine *Wasu* entitled "A Student's Romance."⁶²⁷ The story is about a romantic relationship between "Kwao Ahuluh," a "virile Adangwe youth of the Gold Coast" sent at an early age by his "wealthy and lavishly generous" parents to England to study agriculture and "Affuah Oquay," an aspiring medical doctor and "bright

⁶²⁶ New Woman fiction is characterized by strong female figures as heroines who rebel against the limitations placed on their lives and demand same education and economic opportunities as men enjoy. Other examples include Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1889) and *Hedda Gabler* (1891). New Woman writers also included men; among them were Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, and George Gissing. Nelson, *A New Woman Reader*.

⁶²⁷ The author of the short story wrote under the penname "Nwer-Hassue." He asked to remain anonymous, but according to *Wasu*, the writer was a young law student who comes from the Gold Coast. It is possible that the piece was authored by J. B. Danquah. If not, Danquah was the editor of *Wasu* at the time of the story's publication and would have been familiar with the image of the educated woman portrayed in it. Additional research into the identity of the author is needed. The story was published in two parts. "Nwer-Hassue," "A Student's Romance," *Wasu* 3 and 4 (March and June 1927): 20-28; and, "Consummation: The Student's Romance," *Wasu* 5 (September 1927): 12-18.

undergraduate” at one of London’s women’s colleges. Kwao had spent the “best part of his twenty-two years among boys” and was struck by Affuah’s beauty while vacationing with an English family near the coast. When he first encountered Affuah strolling along the boardwalk, he felt for the first time in his life “the perturbing influence of an African maiden.” Eventually, the charming and intelligent Affuah “bravely” rescues Kwao from two instances of racism. The first episode takes place at a dance. Kwao, who has attended the dance with the sister of his English class mate, Babs, is verbally assaulted by an English couple. Their racist comments lead to a fight between Kwao and the couple and ends in physical violence. Just as the English woman is preparing to take a second blow at Kwao, Affuah intervenes, shouting, “Stop it, you little beast . . . Can’t you see he doesn’t hit you because you’re a girl? I’ll scratch your eyes out if you dare to hit him another blow.” The second scene takes place at a theatre in the West End of London. After responding to a racist comment made during the performance, Kwao is asked to leave the theater. He refuses and a fight breaks out between Kwao and the manager of the theater. This time, just as Kwao is preparing to take a swing at the manager, Affuah steps in to take the blow. Later, she explains to Kwao, “Had you hit that manager who knows what days we’d waste attending court.” By taking the punch that was meant for the theater manager, Affuah spared Kwao from court fees and possibly jail. In both instances, Affuah is his heroine and defense against racism in England.

In their invention of African women through the fictive “Marjorie” and Affuah, this group of writers creatively responded to colonial and imperial constructions of African women as illiterate and hypersexual. An example of this kind of representation of African womanhood is Leon Gordon’s female character Tondelayo in his play (and

later film) *White Cargo*.⁶²⁸ Tondelayo, as both a euphemism for West Africa as the “white man’s grave” and source of the white man’s potential downfall. In this story, Tondelayo creeps into the bungalow of an unsuspecting European man, seduces him into a sexual relationship and marriage, and when he fails to satisfy her “constant” demand for sex, she poisons him, leaving him in search of a new “victim.” This is but one illustration of the kind of stereotypes that circulated in Europe during the interwar period.

The educated elite, in their striving to bring about a new nation, could not ignore these kinds of damaging representations of women, and, in turn, Africa. In fact, their nation making focused first and foremost on the overturning of this negative image of African womanhood (and Africa) through fictive women like Marjorie and Affuah. Within the colonial and imperial imagination, African womanhood as a sign of sexual licentiousness and decay for Europeans constructed Africa as “uncivilized” and, therefore, incapable of self-rule. Through fictionalized women in elite newspapers and journals, elite writers presented a strong counter-image of African womanhood and Africa that became essential to their vision of a West African nation and argument for self-government. The project of re-defining African womanhood was, therefore, at the heart of their anti-colonial political project. “Marjorie” and other fictional representations of educated womanhood presented by elites were inseparable from their anti-colonial nationalist projects.

⁶²⁸ Leon Gordon, *White Cargo; A Play of the Primitive* (Boston: Four Seas Co, 1925).

“Of Course I am a Lady”: The Identity Controversy

Local readers were both fascinated and perplexed by “Marjorie”. The question of her identity captured the most attention. For several months, readers sent letters to the paper’s editor demanding “Print her Picture!” and some asked for her hand in marriage.⁶²⁹ The paper was quick to refute these claims. “Zadig” attributed “Marjorie’s” self-imposed anonymity to a case of “feminine shyness.”⁶³⁰ “Marjorie” suggested another, more substantial motive. She wrote, “I have adopted this guise because I think that I can serve them [women] better in this way—not that I am afraid of public opinion or squalid sentimentality.” A person of her “disposition” could “hardly be interested in the frills and fickle” of young men interested in knowing her true identity.⁶³¹ Her comments were met with additional letters and accusations, developing into a controversy that lasted several months and involved at least two other local newspapers, the *Gold Coast Independent* and the *Gold Coast Spectator*. The question of “Marjorie’s” identity as a man or a woman had become so popular that in the summer of 1931 a local Cabaret show featured a man, Mr. Cecil Chinery, dressed in drag as “Miss Marjorie Mensah” in the skit “Of course I am a Lady.” According to the *Gold Coast Independent*, this “Humorous Sketch” written by Captain Whitcombe and Mr. Blomley, “sent the audience into repeated roars of laughter.”⁶³² “Zadig” encouraged readers to attend the event. Playing on “Who is Sylvia” from Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, he wrote,

⁶²⁹ Marjorie replies to Mr. Kwamin’s inquiry into her identity and proposal for marriage in her column on April 27, 1931.

⁶³⁰ “Zadig,” “A Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, April 22, 1931, 2.

⁶³¹ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 27, 1931, 2.

⁶³² The show was in aid of the Rodger Club. In attendance were His Excellency the Governor accompanied by the A.D.C. Lt. H. A. Hughes. The artists included African and Europeans. Among them were Messrs Phillips, Blomley, Canfailla, and Chinery; Captain Whitcombe, and Misses Physllis Ribeiro and Quartey. *Gold Coast Independent*, August 8, 1931, 1010.

Who is Marjorie,
What is she that all of us should doubt so?
If you'd solve the mystery and find out all about her,
come on Friday to the Cabaret
and see the maid pedantic who is writing day by day the articles romantic.⁶³³

The show was a huge success with African and European audiences.⁶³⁴ In 1934, "Zadig" recalled the question of "Marjorie's" identity as the once "famous" question which dominated the Gold Coast press.

The first letter on the topic was written by a Gold Coast lawyer Mr. Asuana Quartey.⁶³⁵ He argued that "Marjorie" was a man. A Gold Coast woman, even a woman with a "superior European education," could not be responsible for the articles that had appeared daily in the *Times*; the "diction and firm grip of the writer" were highly unusual, if not inconceivable for a Gold Coast woman. After declaring "Marjorie" a man, he offered his enthusiastic support for what he called a "new feature in West African journalism" and proceeded to engage "Marjorie's" discussion of the declining morals of school girls.⁶³⁶ His letter emphasized "Marjorie's" uniqueness and justified the public's excitement around this new development in the press. His acceptance of "Marjorie" at the end of his letter and his status as a lawyer and member of Accra's highly-educated

⁶³³ "Zadig," "A Diary of A Man About Town," *West Africa Times*, July 24-25, 1931, 2. The following lines are from Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, "Who is Silvia? / What is she, / That all our swains commend her? / Holy, fair and wise is she; / The heaven such grace did lend her, / That she might admired be. / Is she kind as she is fair? / For beauty lives with kindness. / Love doth to her eyes repair, / To help him of his blindness, / And, being help'd, inhabits there. / Then to Silvia let us sing, / That Silvia is excelling; / She excels each mortal thing / Upon the dull earth dwelling: / To her let us garlands bring. William Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924).

⁶³⁴ The show's success was announced in the August 4, 1931 issue of the *West Africa Times*. The Governor and other local officials attended the show's debut performance.

⁶³⁵ I assume that Asuana Quartey is the same man listed as a member of the Gold Coast Youth Conference continuation committee in 1938. This Asuana Quartey was a lawyer who studied abroad and was possibly a member of the professional group. Jones-Quartey mentions Asuana Quartey as a regular contributor to the newspapers during the 1930s. Jones-Quartey, *A Summary History of the Ghana Press*, 46.

⁶³⁶ Asuana Quartey, Letter to the Editor, *West Africa Times*, April 21, 1931.

professional group introduces the possibility that Asuana Quartey knew “Marjorie” was a man, but still approved of the paper’s creation of “her.”

Two days later, Mr. C. A. Des Bordes, writing in what he described as his “few infantile stock vocabulary,” submitted a letter in agreement with Asuana Quartey. “Marjorie” was a newspaper man; if not, she had achieved “a thing, which, it is understood, is unprecedented in the history of journalism in the Gold Coast, if not West Africa” and the paper needed to include her picture next to her column in order to “gain her more honour and admiration,” and “give more fire to many of our women who are ambitious.” If she is a woman, he argued, she must have had most of her educational training in Europe, though he added, “I dare say, her complete control of English may not wholly emanate from her European training.” After all, “A cat may be sent to Europe for years and come to cry mew mew, but . . . presumably she got the chance and made use of it.” He ended his letter by praising “Marjorie,” proclaiming her a comfort to those of “us who wanted the chance but could not get it.”⁶³⁷

“Marjorie” approached both of her accusers in an equally playful and witty manner, deeming their statements against her womanhood wrong and unfair, though “characteristic” of their “sex.” She asked her accusers, “What do you think of us, after all? You, and a good many others like you, have the most peculiar notions of women—especially Gold Coast women—that I have ever heard of. Do you really think that none of us is capable of writing up a column in a Newspaper?” To Mr. Des Bordes she wrote,

⁶³⁷ C. A. Des Bordes, “Miss Marjorie Mensah is A Man! Print Her Portrait,” Letter to the Editor, *West Africa Times*, April 24, 1931, 3. I do not have evidence on the identity of C. A. Des Bordes, though Stephanie Newell mentions a Mr. and Mrs. Des Bordes from Elmina who were involved in the pre-Marriage Ordinance (1884) legal disputes over the legality and responsibility for the marriage of Africans made through the Christian church. Newell, “Introduction to *Marita*,” 4-5.

“I love your humour which deserve every sympathy, it is so pathetic and touchingly solitary,” adding, “I hardly know whether to regard you with sympathy or sarcasm.” She demanded an apology from both men, if not, she warned, “much worse will follow.”⁶³⁸ On a more serious note, “Zadig” argued there had to be at least one woman in Accra with “the culture and training of Miss Mensah, to write as she writes.” He offered Adelaide Casely Hayford as one example, suggesting that “Miss Marjorie Mensah’s friends of doubting Thomases” read Casely Hayford’s article in the April issue of the *Elders Review* before deciding if it were “really impossible for a West African who is not a man to write the articles which Miss Mensah contributes to *West Africa Times* from day to day.”⁶³⁹ It is not surprising that “Zadig” should have made reference to Casely Hayford, as she is likely one of the models of educated womanhood used in the creation of “Marjorie.” Casely Hayford came from an elite family in Sierra Leone and had spent many years in London, later traveling to the United States. Her primary social agenda during her adult life was the promotion of vocational training for girls.⁶⁴⁰ Casely Hayford’s ideas about girls’ education probably inspired “Marjorie’s” articles on educational reform for girls and women in the Gold Coast.

“Marjorie” and “Zadig,” however, were not the only supporters of “Marjorie’s” identity as a woman. Women letter writers supported her identity, seeing her as a sign of progress and a benefit to all women. An elite African woman, Esther Stonewall Payne, sent a letter to the *Times* in which she wondered why men should want to discourage

⁶³⁸ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, April 27, 1931, 2.

⁶³⁹ “Zadig,” “A Dairy of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, April 30, 1931, 2.

⁶⁴⁰ Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist*.

women by “disputing the reality of Miss Marjorie Mensah as a woman.”⁶⁴¹ African men might think themselves superior to women, yet, to the “average person in this country who is abreast with the times, this statement is obviously fallacious.” Education of girls had only recently expanded in the country; women had not had the same educational opportunities as men, which accounted for their late entry onto the “stage of literary activities.” She asked men to be fair in judging women, and to not force “Miss Mensah” to reveal her identity “at a time when she thinks she can more conveniently serve her country under the guise of a feigned name;” and, if “Marjorie” were a man, her accusers should “keep mute in order that those of us who have not yet had the opportunity of seeing the best part of the educational light elsewhere may endeavor to draw near it and exert ourselves.”⁶⁴² She advised them to “exercise more discretion in handling matters which affect the prestige of women,” and asked that they “be patient to await the results of female education” in the Gold Coast.⁶⁴³

Another woman reader, Evelyn, argued that the Gold Coast had many women who were educated, some of whom had studied in England. “Marjorie” would encourage

⁶⁴¹ Writing a couple of years later, in late January 1933, “Marjorie Mensah” announced the engagement of Miss Stonewall Payne to Mr. Bannerman. Fondly recalling Stonewall Payne’s defense of her identity, she wrote, “I remember when the hue and cry was at its loudest and when most of the supposed intelligent male community were talking at the top of their voices denouncing me as a male masquerading in the frills and airy nothings of the gentle sex, Miss Payne appeared on the horizon as my saviour and amidst the roars, and thunderbolts of the superior sex hurled out a literary masterpiece.” “Some of my critics were astounded, other indignant, some cynics feebly retorted that a male wrote it but since then I have always kept a very warm corner for Miss Payne in my heart. Her second article was on the activities and the results of the Wesleyan [sic] Girls High School which unfortunately ceased to be.” Marjorie implies that Payne might have authored more than a letter in her defense; perhaps an article? Her letter hardly qualifies as a “literary masterpiece,” and I have no evidence of male writers suggesting that Payne’s letter in defense of Marjorie’s identity as a woman was authored by a man. I have also found no evidence of an article by Payne on the topic beyond her letter. “Ladies’ Corner,” *Times of West Africa*, January 26, 1933, 2.

⁶⁴² Ester Stonewall Payne, “A Woman Speaks Out, A Real Name at Last,” Letter to the Editor, *West Africa Times*, May 11, 1931, 4.

⁶⁴³ Ester Stonewall Payne, “A Woman Speaks Out, A Real Name at Last,” Letter to the Editor, *West Africa Times*, May 11, 1931, 4.

these women to present their ideas in the press, showing them that they could “go abreast with the women of any country or nation if only . . . offered an opportunity.” Evelyn asked “Marjorie” to accept her congratulations for “playing well the part of our sex in the *West African Times*.”⁶⁴⁴ These women’s reaction was exactly the response “Marjorie’s” creators had wished for in their invention of her. On the day of “Marjorie’s” newspaper debut, “Zadig” wrote, “By the way she writes, we feel sure many more of her sex will share in the fun of reading her delightful articles.”⁶⁴⁵ And, several weeks later, “Marjorie” proudly observed since her newspaper debut, “four other girls [had] taken up writing,” two of whom, she claimed, had chosen to use their real names.⁶⁴⁶ A man or a woman, “Marjorie” was serving the country by providing women with a model to follow and aspire to. These women saw “Marjorie’s” accusers as impatient and unfair with women.

While men had invented “Marjorie” to inspire women to join their cause, they probably did not anticipate women expressing views different from their own. Women were expected to join the literary world as “helpmates” to men. The educated woman was a critical embellishment to men’s political imagination. Men were accustomed to discussing “their” women—what to do about their role in the nation, as well as their womanhood, education, occupation, and responsibilities as wives and helpmates. They frequently bewailed their absence and alleged disinterest in Accra’s club scene. Speaking at the second anniversary meeting of the Optimists’ Literary Club in Accra, Nana Sir Ofori Atta held men chiefly responsible for stimulating women’s entrance into literary

⁶⁴⁴ Evelyn, “Congratulations for Marjorie’s Century Number,” Letter to the Editor, *West Africa Times*, July 28, 1931, 3.

⁶⁴⁵ “Zadig,” “A Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, March 19, 1931, 2.

⁶⁴⁶ “Ladies Corner,” *West Africa Times*, May 4, 1931, 2.

and social life, urging them to “cultivate literary and social pursuits in our women.”⁶⁴⁷ Men had long complained of the “poor state” of the “female sex,” notably their “poor intellectual and social advancement due to successive faulty systems of education both by Government and the Missions.” “Marjorie” was men’s response to this situation; an answer to the prayers of “a people belaboured with such a disability.” Who among them would not embrace “Marjorie” as “a powerful pen” that “promises to point the way to make the educated daughter of the soil a worthy helpmate of her male folk in his great work for the uplift of the Nation.”⁶⁴⁸ She would help “lift” women up to the level of men, ensuring that these men could pursue their own “great work” on behalf of the Nation.

But were these men ready for a real woman to take the podium? Were they willing to listen to views separate from their own? And, were they open to incorporating the opinions and desires of real women into their political imaginings? In 1931, Danquah, Coussey, and Stewart were comfortable with her invention—with giving her a “Corner” in their newspaper that they oversaw, edited, and sometimes wrote. However, “Marjorie” was not only a representation of men’s future Africa or a “placeholder” for the educated the New Woman to someday inhabit. Her presence in the press inspired real women to submit letters and try their hand at journalism. The fictive “Marjorie” created space for actual women, including Mabel Dove, Ruby Papafio, Ester Stonewall Payne, Jane Prah, Emma Barnes, and Evelyn, to contribute to the otherwise male-dominated discussions of womanhood, nation, race, and love and marriage taking place on the pages

⁶⁴⁷ *West Africa Times*, August 31, 1931, 1.

⁶⁴⁸ Mr. Kofi Tawia (of Accra), “To Them Who Would Probe into Miss Marjorie Mensah’s Identity,” Letter to the Editor, *Gold Coast Independent*, July 18, 1931, 922.

of Accra's newspapers; and, not only as men's representations of the nation, but as actors separate from men with their own opinions and goals. The women writers who spoke through "Marjorie" might have used her personality to alter these men's original vision for womanhood and the future of Africa, and to increase their control over their own "uplift" and advancement. Writing about the recent election of Mr. Kitson Mills as the President of the Rodger Club in 1932, "Marjorie" asked that he make an effort to provide entertainment or events specifically for women, suggesting he add women's tennis tournaments and debates to the club agenda. She was sure that such changes would not disturb the "urbanity of the male members of the club." She promised Kitson Mills that should he answer her prayers, many women would "fall to worship and write in a special corner in [their] diaries some private and very tender little encomiums to the memory of one who brought about a social change of things from which we have reaped great benefits." She argued that *even* with the addition of women's events and activities, the club would *remain* a space of intellectual debate and discussion.⁶⁴⁹

Owing to the fact that men and women used the penname "Marjorie Mensah," it is difficult to know how the gender of the writer behind each article affected "Marjorie's" opinions. Her comment on the sexism of Rodger Club men and their club programming and the sarcastic tone with which she asked for change might be evidence of real elite women trying to carve a place for themselves within the public sphere. It is possible that men, while bemoaning women's absence from the club scene, were simultaneously discouraging women from participating in it by refusing to alter their club's activities to accommodate them. It is unlikely that little or no conflict existed between men and

⁶⁴⁹ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *West Africa Times*, February 15, 1932, 2.

women among Accra's professional group. "Marjorie's" columns provide hints of possible conflict; however, additional research is needed to better understand the gender politics within this group of writers and how such politics might have affected their political project.

The "Woman Question" and the "True Patriot"

While struggles between men and women are difficult to read in this case, the controversy over "Marjorie's" identity as a man or a woman clearly demonstrated the fault line that divided Accra's educated community. The controversy, which probably began as a joke within the highly-educated group (Accra's professionals), turned into a battle between two different sections of the reading community: locally-educated men and highly-educated men and women. The *Times*, more so than other local papers published at this time, was a product of highly-educated men and women who attended "society" functions and belonged to the elite African Rodger Club. The battle that developed between local non-elite readers and the writers for the *Times* was not so much over "Marjorie's" sex, as it was about defining literary, social, and national life—an internal conversation that the professional group feared would have a negative Africa's image for external audiences. Both groups used the newspapers to promote their own agendas for a future Gold Coast nation that revolved around the woman and marriage question—that is, how educated (and opinionated) should African women be? And, how should educated men and women marry? The answer to these questions would determine the "true patriot."

In May 1931, local freelance writer, C. S. Adjei, submitted a letter of enquiry into to “Marjorie’s” identity. Adjei was described by “Marjorie” as a member of the “local classes.”⁶⁵⁰ He frequently involved himself in public debates and controversies. During the 1930s, his articles and letters appeared regularly in two other local papers, *Gold Coast Spectator* and *Gold Coast Independent*.⁶⁵¹ His letter to “Marjorie” was characteristically inflammatory.⁶⁵² Like Asuana Quartey and Des Bordes, Adjei argued that “Marjorie” was the penname of a newspaper man. Unlike “Marjorie’s” early accusers, Adjei was determined to prove his point, and with less humor and wit. His was not an attempt to bring publicity to the “maid pedantic.” He believed that her writing was simply “too masculine.” He conceded that while there were women who could fly “aeroplanes” and write well enough to command respect from the “Sir Walter Scotts and Swinburnes” of the literary world, women were women; they had emotions that were “distinctively feminine,” and “whatever guise a woman may put on for literary purposes, these unconsciously well up in her and occasionally break out as it were to betray her sex.” “Marjorie’s” column was “free” of these “outbreaks” of “feminine” emotions, and,

⁶⁵⁰ “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, May 4, 1931, 2.

⁶⁵¹ Adjei was a “local freelance writer.” Jones-Quartey, *A Summary History of the Ghana Press*, 24. In my own research I have found several articles by C. S. Adjei. Many of them are in response to other writers. In the early 1930s, Mr. Adjei was involved in a heated multi-newspaper debate on witchcraft. The debate involved several writers and the discussion lasted several months. His other articles focused on local political issues. He was also mentioned in an article on Mr. Sekyi’s lecture on “social progress” to the Optimist Literary Club. During the Q & A, Mr. Adjei asked Mr. Sekyi a question on tradition and modernity. Among his more practical pieces, he wrote an article entitled “Reflections on the Income Tax Proposition,” which appeared in the *Gold Coast Independent*, November 14, 1931, 1450. In his autobiography, Nnamdi Azikiwe mentions C. S. Adjei as one of the many people who engaged in press debate over self-government in the 1930s. Azikiwe advocated “Dominion Status,” defined as self-government within a Commonwealth which the King was head of (as articulated in the 1931 Statute of Westminster). He recalled many views were expressed in the press as to when this historic change to self-government should take place in the Gold Coast. Included in this discussion were intellectuals, politicians, writers, and “leaders in different walks of life.” Others mentioned by name in addition to Adjei were “Lobster,” Moses Danquah, Komli Gbedemah (senior), Therson Cofie (of the *Independent*), and H. K. Mould of the *Spectator*. Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 279.

⁶⁵² Adjei frequently quoted from European writers and philosophers to support his arguments.

therefore, had to be the product of a man writer. Adjei argued that the *Times*, which called itself a “first-class” newspaper, had with their invention of “Marjorie” underestimated the intelligence of *other* men writers in the Gold Coast. He suggested that any educated man could see that “Marjorie” was a fabrication—a “pet” used by the *Times* to advance their own agenda to reform the “womanhood of Africa.” He deemed “Marjorie’s” womanhood “too lofty” and lobbied for its adjustment in order that it better match the situation of middling men and woman readers.⁶⁵³

Perhaps “Marjorie” was “too lofty.” After all, most locally-educated men had never left the coast of West Africa, whereas “Marjorie” was reported to have studied at elite schools in England. As argued by Stonewall Payne, “Marjorie’s” educational accomplishments were impressive; most Gold Coast men had not achieved the same level of education. Her achievements, therefore, aroused suspicion. Adjei suggested that the only possible explanation for her literary accomplishments was that “Marjorie” was the product of elite men. “Marjorie’s” “lofty” womanhood was not only perceived as a threat to Adjei’s own status as a man in educated “society,” but “she” was also not the kind of woman he (or other locally-educated man) was likely to marry. The Gold Coast needed a more realistic model of African womanhood, not for women to follow, but for young men to use in their own quest for “suitable” woman partners. If the paper wanted to see all educated men aspire to their model of an educated manhood, marriage and family, they would need to revise their construction of womanhood. Otherwise, locally-educated men would never achieve the class aspirations generated by the paper.

⁶⁵³ C. S. Adjei, “To the Editor of ‘*West Africa Times*,’ Accra,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 16, 1931, 618.

It is also possible that locally-educated men saw “Marjorie’s” fantasy of a future cadre of powerful educated women in politics, society, and the workplace as a threat to their own economic and social prosperity. By 1931, the depression had made an impact on Accra’s economy, and clerical work for locally-educated men was becoming increasingly difficult to find. The colonial government was decreasing the number of positions for Africans in government service and planning to introduce an income tax. Mission schools and private firms were offering less pay and pensions were disappearing. Some educated men feared that educated women would compete with them for jobs. “In newspapers, literate men expressed ambivalence about women ‘taking the place of men as clerks,’ and warned about ‘the competition for employment between the sexes.’”⁶⁵⁴ “Marjorie’s” advocacy of secretarial schools for women and her support of women’s progress in the workplace would only have fueled these men’s anxieties.

“Marjorie’s” reply to Adjei further articulated the tension that existed between university-educated professionals and locally-educated men. She opened her letter by poking fun at Adjei’s writing style, describing his letter as “unfit” for publication. She wrote, “I suppose, like the rest of a particular local class, Mr. Adjei has been told by some person, not very wise, that he is a writer—or that he has the flare of a dilettante.” She suggested Adjei focus on his own self-improvement instead of trying to prove to the “world” the most “monstrous” argument she had ever heard from the “supposed intelligent” that “the African woman long born a child is still one—and nothing else.” Not only had Adjei offended African women, but the nation and race. Through his “Letter of Enquiry” he had proven himself an impoverished “patriot” who lacked the

⁶⁵⁴ Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 86.

“patriot’s complacency and wit;” a man whose vision for the future of the country was, according to “Marjorie,” “impotent,” and unlikely to materialize. Men like Adjei, she claimed, “do more danger than good” and the sooner that they are “exterminated,” the better.

Reader Kofi Tawia agreed; the stakes were high. Adjei was flirting with reputation and welfare of the nation and race by introducing doubt into “Marjorie’s” existence. Such enquiries ought not to “emanate from a truly conscientious son of the soil,” though, as Adjei was proving, it was a crime that some “countrymen,” supposed “patriots,” were “deplorably guilty” of. By questioning in the press “one member of a *subject* nation of the identity of another member who tries to contribute *his or her* quota to the Nation’s effort at ultimate self expression” was, according Tawia, an act of “gross impropriety” that “borders on *wanton treachery*, considering . . . that the public press is the tongue of the Sovereign State that lords over the *subject* nation.” He added, “assuming . . . that Marjorie Mensah is merely the *Nom de Plume* of a male correspondent of the *West African Times*, it is improper and unpatriotic for a son of the soil to hold up the fact to strangers.”⁶⁵⁵

Reader Mr. Ofofu supported “Marjorie’s” and Tawia’s assessment of the situation. Adjei was a “menace” and “perfect theorist” who in all of his writing had failed to offer anything beneficial to the “race.” Great men like Mensah Sarbah, Cleland, Attoh Ahuma, and Casely Hayford would never have bothered with such small disputes. Nor would these men attack a woman writing on behalf of the nation, an act which Ofofu

⁶⁵⁵ Mr. Kofi Tawia (of Accra), “To Them Who Would Probe into Miss Marjorie Mensah’s Identity,” Letter to the Editor, *Gold Coast Independent*, July 18, 1931, 922.

described as “stripping ourselves naked to the outside world.”⁶⁵⁶ Men who accused “Marjorie” of being a man were not “true patriots.” The true patriot had a deep and visceral love of country.

According to the *West Africa Times*, patriotism is what made England not only a “great nation,” but “England.” Gold Coasters love of country—“or more fittingly Africa—appears to be too prosaic to bring about those powerful revolutions of feeling which have always propelled the world and brought about prodigious changes.” They lacked the “patriotic zeal” that would have enabled them to speak about Africa with the “poignancy and strength of feeling” that “Scott spoke of his immortal Caledonia.” Though, mere words were not enough; Africans must learn to “kneel with tears in our eyes at the beautiful shrines that time has created for us” in order that “we may rise again an inspired people thrilled with a new glory, a new worship, a new hope, a new ideal, and a new and greater aspiration.”⁶⁵⁷ “Marjorie Mensah” was part of a new hope and ideal, a path to greater aspirations. The locally-educated men’s attack on “Marjorie’s” identity was perceived by the educated elite as a strike against their project to establish a future post-colonial nation. Their letters threatened to spotlight the fact that few educated women were part of the West African public sphere, and thus, budding citizenry—a critical piece of information the educated elite were trying to obscure with their daily chatter about educated women’s achievements in the press and with “Marjorie Mensah.”

Adjei argued that by insisting on the truth, which he saw as necessary and good for society, he was the real patriot; men like Kofi Tawia and Oforu who attempted to conceal the truth were unpatriotic. These men were presenting a false representation of

⁶⁵⁶ Oforu, “Was Mr. C. S. Adjei’s Query Justifiable?,” *Gold Coast Independent*, July 25, 1931, 950.

⁶⁵⁷ “Patriotism,” *West Africa Times*, March 31, 1931, 2.

womanhood for the “white world,” tricking this world into “regarding our women as generally capable of contributing articles such as those that emanate from the veiled personality of Marjorie Mensah.”⁶⁵⁸ But, he warned, the white world would soon see through their lies. Quoting Kant, he argued that no man had the right indulge in false representations.

Adjei resented their representation of him as a public nuisance whose only objective was to stir up senseless controversy. He saw himself as an intellectual and journalist dedicated to stimulating honest public debate. And besides, his articles were not always critical, he had published several articles in the press that were more practical in nature that even Dr. Danquah had admired. Unlike the writer’s speaking in defense of “Marjorie’s” identity as a woman, Adjei was probably not on the “inside” of the publishing world or part of the professional group. Most of his arguments about “Marjorie’s” identity were gleaned from the newspaper, and not from an inside source. Also interesting is the fact that Adjei never uses the term “nation”; he uses the term “literary world” of Accra instead when referencing womanhood and patriotism. Writers in support of “Marjorie’s” identity as woman frequently invoked the nation. This might reflect the professional group’s self-conscious political project to lead the Gold Coast into a new nation through their newspapers and clubs (Accra’s literary world).

The only reader to come to Adjei’s defense was Cofie Aidoo. Aidoo suggested that the reason so few women had shown in interest “in the theories of their so-called fellow friend” was because most were “not even aware of the existence of the ‘*West Africa Times*.’” Readers were smart to be skeptical; “Marjorie’s” “theories as well as her

⁶⁵⁸ C. S. Adjei, “Marjorie Mensah—A Reply to Ofosu,” *Gold Coast Independent*, August 8, 1931, 1000-1003.

identity” were “unusual.” Aidoo suggested that enquires into her identity should not be viewed as “fame seeking” or as unpatriotic, but as evidence of “a race seeking to know itself.” The enquirers, he claimed, were knowledge-seeking individuals interested in national and racial development. He described “Marjorie’s” response to Adjei as unnecessarily antagonistic and full of “educational conceit”; the product of “a ring of university men who regard themselves as infallible dictators and teachers.” While many of these “conceited gods” were educated in “the ‘science’ of philology and literature,” most were “woefully ignorant in the various branches of the social sciences.” This ignorance, according to Aidoo accounted for “a great deal of their present attitude, as well as the attitude of the easy dupes who blindly follow[ed] them.” These “small minded” men could not be trusted to lead the country’s progress.⁶⁵⁹

The battle between these men continued for several more weeks. Kofi Tawia called Adjei “a pseudo-literary foster-son of Macaulay and his like” who suffered from “extreme Anglo-philialia.” His “pointing out to the ‘White’ . . . [world] a tender spot in the policy of a Paper which is a very important organ of [his] Country” was a “fell crime” against members of his nation and race. He admonished Adjei for continuing to “inflame the controversy that now blazes around the identity or rather sex of ‘Marjorie Mensah,’” a controversy that “even the ‘Colour Prejudice Crackers’ of your ‘White World’ have, in fairness to our race, withdrawn their attacks.” To save the country and race from future embarrassments, journalists, he argued, ought to have at least two or three generations of

⁶⁵⁹ Aidoo identified Mr. Oforu as one of the “easy dupes,” and described his criticism of Adjei as “noisy,” “nervous,” jealous, and malicious. He suggested that writers stop hiding behind pennames. He wrote, “Unreal names cannot be one of the peculiarities of a first-class paper, such as the *Times*. Cofie Aidoo, “Marjorie Mensah and Her Defenders. Arguments Should be Met Squarely and Efficiently,” *Gold Coast Independent*, August 8, 1931, 1010-1011.

western education behind them. Men of this pedigree, he suggested, know “what to put and what not to put before the world when vital questions of National interest are at issue.”⁶⁶⁰ According to Tawia, a strong educated woman like “Marjorie” was the “right” kind of image to put before the world. He argued that any man who had been to England for education would have supported “Marjorie.”

Contrary to the “general belief that our women are still swimming in illiteracy,” Tawia suggested that women like “Marjorie” did exist. In recent years, he told his readers, women had performed well at the Seventh Standard, Telegraph School, College Preceptors, and Cambridge Local Examinations. Women’s submissions for a local Essay Competition, he claimed, showed women performing better than men. He could also name at least four Gold Coast women actively submitting articles to the press, one of whom was his wife. But these were not the kind of women Adjei and Aidoo were likely to meet. Tawia argued that they did not have access to “that sort of society wherein one comes into contact with the ‘cream’ of our educated female element.” He told them, “going to a thing or the Pictures at the Palladium” was not the “best sort social circles” in which to meet “ladies who will make you disabuse your mind of your low opinion of the intellectual ability of their sex.”⁶⁶¹ According to Tawia, only men of a certain class had access to women like “Marjorie,” and therefore, “Marjorie’s” accusers revealed less about the situation of women’s education in the Colony and more about their own class status (that is, their exclusion from Accra “Society”).

⁶⁶⁰ Kofi Tawia, “Marjorie Mensah to C. S. Adjei,” *Gold Coast Independent*, September 12, 1931, 1174-1175.

⁶⁶¹ Tawia, “Marjorie Mensah to C. S. Adjei,” 1174-1175.

Adjei suggested that the real writer behind the name “Kofi Tawia” was not a true *African* patriot, but “a man of . . . uncertain colour and uncertain homeland.”⁶⁶² He argued that concealing the truth about one’s country is not a patriotic act, but the “patriotism of moral perverts and other non-normal persons.” Tawia’s brand of patriotism yielded a nation based on lies and contortions.⁶⁶³ He accused Tawia of misreading his comments on patriotism, and sarcastically wondered why Tawia’s “highly intelligent wife” failed to catch his literary mistake, concluding that she must be “incapable of playing the role of literary helpmeet” [sic]. Any literary mistake was unacceptable from a man claiming four generations of education behind him. Adjei’s response focused on Tawia’s claim to elite status and his “intellectual conceit.” He wrote that while Tawia may have had Sekyi as a classmate, he had failed to understand Sekyi’s teachings, proving that association with great men does not make a great man. He described his own understanding of literature and philosophy as much deeper than most men in the Gold Coast, if not equal to Danquah’s and Sekyi’s. Returning to the issue of “Marjorie’s” identity, he argued that the *Times* had seriously misjudged readers; they had foolishly expected their readers to be “passive recipients of information.” The paper would not “keep the white world in everlasting ignorance of the truth.” The white world will “see through the game.” He concluded, “Marjorie Mensah is a man; and it is about time the fact was admitted.” It was neither “honorable nor just to deceive”; dishonesty

⁶⁶² It is possible that Kofi Tawia was Kenneth MacNeill Stewart, though additional research is necessary to confirm this.

⁶⁶³ C. S. Adjei, “Marjorie Mensah. A Reply to Kofi Tawia’s Illiterate Effusions. The Patriotism of Moral Perverts,” *Gold Coast Independent*, October 3, 1931, 1257-1258.

and manipulation “are the greatest enemies of the world today,” and fighting against them will be seen to be the greatest patriotism that one can show for this country.”⁶⁶⁴

The controversy over “Marjorie’s” identity as man or woman is a dramatization of Accra’s burgeoning and increasingly stratified reading public and their negotiation of an educated African identity and future. In relation to the increasingly vocal group of newly educated young men, “Marjorie” was a chisel used daily to sculpt “exclusive African society” and its leadership over every sphere of life within the educated community, including these young men; to support her existence was to be on board with the “Nation,” a “true patriot” capable of leading the Gold Coast into a “New Age.” By adding “Marjorie” to their newspaper, and, in turn, to their anti-colonial project, these writers invented a feminine presence that would serve their anti-colonial agenda, and, as part of this agenda, their own internal “civilizing” mission that sought to reform the newly educated group. To accept “Marjorie” was to accept men’s vision of the nation. The true patriot, therefore, not only accepted “her” womanhood, but celebrated it, regardless of its fact or fiction.

The “Woman Question” to the “Marriage Question”

What was the “Nation” that these men were allegedly betraying in their enquiries into “Marjorie’s” identity? Embedded in “Marjorie’s” womanhood was an economy of gender and familial relationships which, at this time and throughout the colonial period,

⁶⁶⁴ C. S. Adjei, “Marjorie Mensah. A Reply to Kofi Tawia’s Illiterate Effusions. The Patriotism of Moral Perverts,” *Gold Coast Independent*, October 3, 1931, 1257-1258.

were actively being re-worked (or reformed) by members of the educated group. At the heart of the highly-educated group's vision of the nation lay their vision of the companionate marriage that was monogamous and modeled after Europe; and, at the center of this marriage stood the educated, socially polished educated African woman (represented through "Marjorie").

"Marjorie" was a strong proponent of monogamous companionate marriage over customary marriages. She argued that the companionate marriage led to "a well regulated home, a close and intimate family life and the careful upbringing of family and children." It was what she believed the Gold Coast needed more than anything else—the "beauty and dignity of good homes" were the "real wealth of a nation."⁶⁶⁵ The companionate marriage and womanhood African professionals envisioned during the 1930s, and to a large extent practiced existed in sharp contrast to "traditional" West African marriage and gender norms. Customary marriages recognized monogamous and polygamous unions, and certainly, they did not center on a companion-relation between genteel, educated husbands and wives. Contestation between these forms of marriage, one based on European customs, norms, and practices, and the other on West African, assumed a critical place in the highly-educated group's struggle for social and political hegemony over the locally-educated group, and in their claims to be the country's future leaders.

The "marriage question," that is, how educated Africans ought to marry and organize their families, was a constant source of debate within the educated group at least since the 1880s. As Kristin Mann's study of marriage in colonial Lagos illustrates, the

⁶⁶⁵ "Marjorie Mensah," "Ladies' Corner," *Times of West Africa*, January 26, 1933, 2.

marriage question was fiercely debated among the coastal educated elite during the early years of colonial rule. Similar debates dominated the Gold Coast press during this time period as well. Stephanie Newell recently edited a novel that appeared as a serial in a Gold Coast paper entitled *Marita: or the Folly of Love*. The novel beautifully illustrates the conflict within the educated group of the Gold Coast over the two forms of marriage in the Colony.⁶⁶⁶ The main source of tension among the western-educated group in both cities at this time was the co-existence of two very different forms of marriage in these colonies—ordinance marriages based on English law and “African” marriages based on “native law.” The Marriage Ordinance, which was introduced in 1884, was initially designed to regulate and license civil weddings. The Ordinance was based on English law and assumed a monogamous English couple and family. Through its articulation of English marriage in the colonies for western-educated and Christian Africans, it created an “African” form of marriage that was assumed to be polygamous. The recognition of two different forms of marriage through the Marriage Ordinance was an early manifestation of what would later become known as indirect rule.⁶⁶⁷ Provided its association with indirect rule, it is, therefore, not surprising that the marriage question dominated the pages of the African newspapers throughout the colonial period. The “other” form of marriage assumed through the introduction of the Ordinance was the “African” form, and included a range of local marriage and family practices associated with different ethnic groups. Generally speaking, African marriages in the southern region of the Gold Coast supported monogamy and polygamy, though the decision to live monogamously was generally the man’s. Most marriages were based on an agreement

⁶⁶⁶ *Marita: or the Folly of Love*, edited by Stephanie Newell (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

⁶⁶⁷ Newell, “Introduction to *Marita*,” 6.

between two families, and married couples did not cohabit or share finances. The woman partner and her family were financially responsible for the couple's children, while the male partner was financially responsible for his sister's children. At death, personal wealth acquired by either partner was divided amongst family members and did not pass to either partner or their immediate children. This system stood in sharp contrast to the kind of marriage enforced through the colonial Marriage Ordinance that assumed a European couple who shared personal wealth and finances and lived in single family homes.

The educated coastal elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century favored Christian monogamous marriages that became an essential part of their identity and status as elite Africans. Elaborate Christian weddings were a sign of their unique culture as educated Africans and improved their status within colonial society.⁶⁶⁸ While this group supported this form over other African forms of marriage, early coastal elites were not convinced that the Marriage Ordinance was the best or only expression of monogamous church-based marriages for Africans. Many Lagos and Gold Coast newspaper writers of this period argued against the Ordinance, suggesting that marriages based in English law gave too much power to women. Men objected to the binding nature of the marriage contract, which they believed constrained their authority over their wives; if separation was only by death or adultery, the possibility of divorce could no longer be used as a means of controlling women's behavior. They also opposed the colonial courts control and authority over this form of marriage (and its control over the African men and women who married under the law), and disagreed with the inheritance

⁶⁶⁸ Mann, *Marrying Well*, 57.

laws that were part of the Ordinance. These laws were based on English law and contrasted sharply with the inheritance patterns of the Yoruba, Ga, and Akan, as well as most other ethnic groups in the four colonies.⁶⁶⁹ Some elites argued for monogamous church-based marriages based on African customs, norms, and inheritance patterns. This type of marriage common during the early colonial period was known as “country marriage.”⁶⁷⁰

During the 1930s, Africa’s educated elite rarely discussed “country marriage” *per se*, though some readers continued to argue for recognition of non-Ordinance marriages that were monogamous and church-based. The concept of a dual system of marriage, ordinance and customary marriages, had become commonplace with the institutionalization of the dual mandate system during the 1920s. The marriage debates of the 1930s, therefore, revolved around the pros and cons of ordinance and customary marriages. Though, most newspaper writers favored a single system of marriage for all Africans modeled after the European form of marriage.

While there were many debates on marriage during the 1930s, the debate sponsored by the Young People’s Literary Club on April 27, 1931 yielded a lively discussion in the press. The question of the debate was, “Is the European form of marriage beneficial to the African.” In the chair was the Bishop of Accra, Dr. John Orfeur Aglionby, D.D., M.C. accompanied by Nee Manche Kojo Ababio IV, K.M.A.C., the Manche of James Town, and his Elders.⁶⁷¹ The debaters who defended the benefits of

⁶⁶⁹ Mann, *Marrying Well*, 52-53; 84; 109.

⁶⁷⁰ Newell, “Introduction to *Marita*,” 7.

⁶⁷¹ The paper also named Mr. Quartey and Mr. John Buckman, M.B.E. as present at the meeting. It is unknown if Mr. Quartey was Asuana Quartey or Mr. E. K. Quartey who argued against the European form of marriage at the debate. *West Africa Times*, April 24, 1931, 1.

European marriage were Mr. W. T. Marbell and Mr. E. K. Quartey, and those who argued against it were Mr. Cofie Aidoo and Mr. Owusu. The marriage question was of “of paramount interest to every adult African in the community.”⁶⁷² The debate attracted a large audience that included a cross section of Accra’s population, African chiefs, barristers, clergymen, teachers, and clerks “who followed the arguments advanced on both sides with the keenest interest.”⁶⁷³ After the question had been argued, a general vote was taken and the Chairman announced that “in the opinion of the House, the European form of marriage was not beneficial to the African.”⁶⁷⁴

In the days and weeks following the debate, the marriage question filled the pages of Accra’s main newspapers. As several post-debate articles and readers’ letters indicate, the debate provoked responses from all sections of the reading community, revealing a complex of issues that divided the reading public. Newspaper writers were both amazed and disappointed by the decision. The *Gold Coast Independent* deemed the decision “unfortunate,” and wrote, “Whatever disadvantages there are in the European form of marriage—and there are many—especially in regard to the male party to the contract, there are also very real benefits which . . . outweigh the disadvantages.” The main benefit, according to the author, was monogamy, which allegedly saved men from several wives and their “bickerings and perpetual quarrelling.” Monogamous marriage offered men “peace of mind” and a “congenial atmosphere” that was “well worth the risk.”⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷² “Public Debate at the Youngpeople’s Club,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 2, 1931, 559.

⁶⁷³ “Public Debate at the Youngpeople’s Club,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 2, 1931, 559.

⁶⁷⁴ According to Cofie Aidoo, club members suggested a re-hearing of the issue during the Anniversary meeting of the Young People’s Literary Club. Cofie Aidoo, “Miss Marjorie Mensah on the Young People’s Public Debate,” *Gold Coast Independent*, July 4, 1931, 841. I have searched subsequent newspaper issues for notices on the second debate. I have not found any evidence of a second debate.

⁶⁷⁵ “Public Debate at the Youngpeople’s Club,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 2, 1931, 559.

The *Independent* suggested that the audience members who voted against the benefit of European marriage had incorrectly conflated this form with “the kind of marriage prevailing in England, formulated in the Church rituals and legalised by the Marriage Ordinance of 1884 as is in vogue in this Colony.”⁶⁷⁶ This was not the form of marriage under debate; rather, the “European” marriage referred to a set of marital and family practices that they claimed belonged to Christianity. In fact, the paper argued, “there is no such thing as European form of marriage as opposed to the African form. This is meaningless, unintelligible and unreal; we know of no form of marriage which is distinctly European.”⁶⁷⁷ There was only the Christian form, which did not belong to England or Europe; thus, if “Christian marriage in principle is beneficial to the whiteman” it should not be “inimical” to the welfare of the African. Monogamous Christian marriage was no more English than it was African. In this way, the *Independent* struggled to remove Europe and England from monogamous marriage, to decolonize this form of marriage by placing it in the domain of religion, Christianity—a domain that they perceived as offering a space for an African Christianity independent from Europe or England.

The writers at the *West Africa Times* went several steps further in their efforts to decolonize marriage. They argued that the *Independent* had confused the issue by introducing the term “Christian marriage” into the discussion. The *Times* wrote that monogamy was not the exclusive property of Europe or Christianity. They saw marriage as a secular institution. They argued that “marriage, like property,” was “purely a social function,” and did not belong to any society, and therefore could not be claimed as

⁶⁷⁶ “European Form of Marriage and the African,” *The Gold Coast Independent*, May 23, 1931, 656.

⁶⁷⁷ “European Form of Marriage and the African,” *The Gold Coast Independent*, May 23, 1931, 656.

English, African, or European. The *Times* supported monogamy because they believed from a sociological perspective that it would best serve the progress of the “Nation.” Monogamy safeguarded the “health of the community” by creating the “desire for individuality and property,” which allowed “a community to increase its wealth.” It secured “the centralisation of the family’s interest in a distinct group of children.” Moreover, it encouraged “a young” people, “just coming into the fore in the higher social relationships,” to practice self-discipline and caution. Monogamous life-long marriage contracts demanded that young men exercise good judgment in selecting “a wife of his own class,” affording these young men numerous opportunities to practice self-discipline and commitment—the substance of any “good patriot.” It was for these “social” reasons that that the *Times* proclaimed monogamy “best for *any* society, African or European, whose desire is to pass from a chaotic state to a well ordered and disciplined state.”⁶⁷⁸ Using a sociological analysis of marriage, the *Times* decolonized marriage, removing “ownership” over monogamous marriage from any one group, place or time. Monogamous marriage was now a *universal* social institution that *all* societies had access to.

At the heart of their argument over the European form was the assumption that ultimately the Gold Coast would (and should) have one form of marriage. The *Times* was eager to see the dual system abolished, replaced by a single form. “Zadig” argued that the dual system of marriage (possibly a critique of the dual mandate) resulted in “evil.” He pointed to a letter by reader Kofie Mensah who asked the paper if it was in order, “so far as civilisation is concerned,” for a man to “get rid” of his first wife married in

⁶⁷⁸ “Confusing the Issues,” *West Africa Times*, May 26, 1931, 2. Italics added.

accordance with native custom and “take up [a] ‘frock’ [lady]?” “Zadig” believed that Mr. Mensah’s problem was “the eternal problem that is sapping the moral health of our womenfolk, especially those of them that are called the ‘cloth’ ladies.” He explained that there were “certain young men” who when beginning their working lives married “uneducated . . . ‘cloth’ woman or lady” who helped them through their early “struggles,” seeing these young men several years later well placed in business or government employment. Once these young men come into “some fortune” and find their status within society elevated, they begin to search for wives of their social standing. These young men, according to “Zadig,” “inevitably” marry educated “frock” women who would insist on Ordinance marriages. If these men marry under the Ordinance, the first wife (legally) “has to go.” This process, “Zadig” wrote entailed many hardships on uneducated women and “acts of ungratefulness” on the part of men. Under these circumstances, what were young educated men and uneducated women to do?

A woman’s only recourse was to tell the colonial courts that she and the man were married by native custom, though, more often than not, “Zadig” argued, young men severed ties with their first wives and married second (educated) wives under the Ordinance, causing much grievance for the first wife who had very few rights to claim continued support from her husband. According to “Zadig,” the problem for women lay not with young men, but with the dual system. If the “institutions of the country” stopped “recognising the two forms of marriage, by custom, and under the Ordinance,” the problem would be solved. A singular system of marriage would enable all women to

make claims on their husbands through the courts if a divorce were sought by either party.⁶⁷⁹

But another problem, which men readers frequently pointed out, and which “Marjorie” and “Zadig” frequently covered up, was the absence of educated women to marry outside customary law. Throughout the colonial period, the number of educated men significantly outnumbered women, and yet “Marjorie” offered the reading public a very different picture. She suggested that the education of girls had made great progress, and insisted there were many young educated girls in the city eager to marry educated young men. She maintained this fantasy throughout the life of the column by periodically writing about Accra’s “promising young girls.” She simply could not understand why Accra’s “promising youngmen” were going about “Town talking that they [were] unable to find the correct girl to marry” when the country had some of the “most beautiful, intelligent and promising girls as could be wished for anywhere.” All of these girls, she claimed, were absolutely “suitable to be any man’s wife.” Just the other day she had the pleasure of meeting four of these young and “charming” girls on the High Street in the neighborhood of the Kingsway. These girls were an “embellishment to any society, chatting and keeping up such a fine, measured and moderate pace of walking that called to mind some of the English girls from the Convents in Europe out for a constitutional.” They wore “correct clothes and had on correct walking shoes, that were simply smart, and their hats were sweet little things in straw with a modest band around it.” “Marjorie” was “in love” with everything about them, and quite frankly, did not know “how some youngmen take it.” She speculated that it must be “a sort of conceit

⁶⁷⁹ “Zadig,” “Diary of a Man About Town,” *West Africa Times*, November 13-14, 1931, 2.

that amounts to impertinence” that has led some of these youngmen to go around town complaining that they cannot find a “correct girl to marry.”⁶⁸⁰

Similar to their discussion of womanhood, the question of authenticity and the fear of mimicry haunted their discussion of marriage. Both the *Independent* and the *Times* supported marriage and family practices associated with Europe and England, but in adopting these forms they did not want to become “Europeanized” or “Anglicized” Africans. One of the strategies they used to decolonize the monogamous marriage and family system was to place this form of marriage in the larger context of history. The *Independent* sought to Africanize Christian marriage, while the *Times* focused on Africanizing secular monogamous partnerships. The *Independent* identified monogamous marriage as a Christian practice and proceeded to argue that Christianity, as a world religion, did not belong to any single people or nation. They blamed the missionaries for local resistance to monogamy. In their haste to “lift black humanity from the depths of so-called depravity to Christian enlightenment,” they had failed to appreciate and understand indigenous customs and to discover ways to improve and consolidate those “not repugnant to good conscience.” They pushed Gold Coast Africans to blindly adopt practices that were incompatible with the practices they had known since their childhood. This inspired hostility among the indigenous population and a hardened attitude towards Christianity and Christian marriage. Educated Christian Africans could learn from their mistakes. They could use new information from anthropology to help revise Christian marriage in a way that would encourage young men and women to

⁶⁸⁰ “Marjorie Mensah,” *Times of West Africa*, April 25, 1932, 2.

gradually adopt a new form of marriage, while retaining certain aspects of the indigenous forms of marriage.⁶⁸¹ The *Times* saw it as neither belonging to Christianity or any people or nation; it was simply one form of marriage among other forms that different groups of people had practiced at different points in time. In their advocacy of the monogamous form, they used their newspaper to “educate” the public about the social benefits of monogamy by celebrating Christian and civil weddings on the front page of their paper. They also used editorials, and of course, “Marjorie Mensah” to support their cause. Both papers’ strategies for decolonizing marriage yielded a similar result. Africans’ adoption of monogamous marriage was a perfectly African choice to make, as Christians, or as practically-minded men and women in search of the form of marriage that would most benefit and support the advancement of their society and nation.

“Marjorie” devoted several post-debate articles on the marriage question. Offering a “woman’s perspective,” she argued that European marriage was the best form of marriage for Gold Coast Africans. She described the African form of marriage as “a trifle distasteful to us modern women,” stating, “[t]here is one thing certain and that is we [women] have achieved nothing out of the older form which we term ‘native marriage.’” According to “Marjorie,” native marriage was the “old” and “primitive” form of marriage of the “old order” which she claimed oppressed women. The recognition of polygamy within customary marriage provided additional evidence against the native form of marriage. “Marjorie” argued that polygamy belonged to “pre-civilization” and had no part to play in the emergence of a “New Age” on the Gold Coast. European monogamous marriage was essential to the “New Age” that she argued promised Gold Coast women

⁶⁸¹ “Public Debate at the Youngpeople’s Club,” *Gold Coast Independent*, May 2, 1931, 559.

the freedom to “stand up side by side with a gentleman” and voice their opinions on social issues. Accepting this form of marriage was the key to the advancement of Gold Coast society. She wrote, “[i]f we have accepted modern cultures as a basis of our racial development and uplift, we cannot make such material deductions in its social make-up or mix the two things together without producing something entirely incongruous.” It was no longer acceptable for Gold Coasters to blend the two forms; a complete transformation was required in order to “progress” as a society and race. European marriage was essential to Africa’s “posterity” and the “future prosperity of that posterity.”⁶⁸²

Her comments on the marriage debate reawakened her accusers, who had fallen silent on the issue of her identity. A letter writer, Mr. Ofosu reported in the *Independent* that Adjei, failing to provide any evidence of “Miss Mensah’s” being man, published an article in the *Gold Coast Spectator*⁶⁸³ in which he tried to bury his mistake by showing support for Mr. Quartey’s article against “Marjorie’s” analysis of the marriage debate.⁶⁸⁴ Cofie Aidoo, another debater against European marriage (and supporter of Adjei’s enquiry into “Marjorie’s” identity) submitted a letter to the *Gold Coast Independent* challenging “Marjorie’s” representation of gender relations among young men and

⁶⁸² “Marjorie Mensah,” “Ladies’ Corner,” *West Africa Times*, June 11, 1931, 2.

⁶⁸³ These exchanges suggest that Adjei issued a “Query” in the *Gold Coast Spectator* between July 13 and July 25 1931; however, it unclear if his letter appeared in the *Spectator*. Adjei’s comments were made in response to Asuana Quartey’s letter to “Marjorie.” Quartey asked “Marjorie” to explain why she had abandoned the marriage question in her column. “Marjorie” made reference to Quartey’s letter in her column July 13, 1931. According to “Marjorie,” Asuana Quartey had published several letters about marriage in the *Gold Coast Spectator* (issues unavailable). After poking fun at Quartey’s literary style and opposing his opinions on marriage, she suggested that they make peace and end their quarrel. It appears that Adjei responded to the debate between Asuana Quartey and Marjorie Mensah in his article in the *Spectator*.

⁶⁸⁴ Adjei’s response is not available in the archive. According to other letter writers, Adjei referenced Mr. Quartey’s article on “Marjorie’s” opinions on marriage in a letter published in the *Spectator*. It is possible that “Mr. Quartey” was Mr. E. K. Quartey who was one of the debaters to argue against the European form of marriage at the YPLC. Ofosu, “Was Mr. C. S. Adjei’s Query Justifiable?,” *Gold Coast Independent*, July 25, 1931, 950.

women in Accra. Aidoo argued that “Marjorie’s” image of a city full of “trained girls” waiting to be married was merely an illusion (like “Marjorie”). He wrote, as much as “the youth of this country would like to worship and adore the truly trained girl, very unfortunately, it has fallen to no one’s lot to meet by accident any of these girls—the fabulous Miss Mensah may claim an isolated exception.” Aidoo’s discussion of the absence of trained girls points to a long-standing “problem” in the Colony; there were very few “educated” women for educated men to marry. The symbol of the educated woman in “Marjorie” was not enough; these men needed women educated to the level (or below). Moreover, the *Times*’s opinions on marriage failed to account for these men’s complex position between competing systems of marriage and familial norms and expectations. They also assumed that their ideas about marriage reform were right all groups within the reading public. Aidoo argued that European marriage “or as some are pleased to call it—Marriage under the Laws of the colony has no direct control over one’s intellectuality and ability—be the individual a party to or an issue of the contract.” He found it unfortunate that the “educated” “Marjorie” was unable to attend the debate. He suggested that she could have learned a few lessons from the group of men that won the debate. He suggested that this group won on account of their logic and experience that was not “gleaned from books which are in parts fictitious,” but was based on “actual happenings in everyday life.” He stated that while the audience at the debate might have admired the “eloquence of an African lady in foreign language,” they were not likely to be “enchanted or convinced into the belief that she [was] a prophetess.”⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁵ Aidoo, “Miss Marjorie Mensah on the Young People’s Public Debate,” 841.

Aidoo's prediction of locally-educated men's continued resistance to "Marjorie," and the "New Age" and "Nation" she came to embody was accurate. While the *Times* remained loyal to the basic elements of the womanhood and marriage imagined in "Marjorie," they did significantly modify how they would promote their ideas. Several years later, J. B. Danquah, as one of the leaders of the Gold Coast Youth Conference of 1938 promoted the formation of a "National Fund," which lobbied for a governing committee of highly-educated professionals working in co-operation with prominent members of the African chieftaincy to implement change in the country. The cornerstone of their program for the Fund was marriage reform. They suggested that the Native Authority help standardize marriage practices in the country by encouraging a singular form of marriage that borrowed heavily from the colonial Marriage Ordinance based on English law. By implementing reform through the chieftaincy, they hoped to reform young men's marriages by incorporating the basic principles of the European form of marriage into the native form.

The *West Africa Times's* vision for the nation was not based on ethnic affiliations, nor was it modeled after the colonial administration, but was instead formed along national lines, similar to the ways that Canada (or other dominion countries at this time) was positioning itself as an independent nation with separate nationality laws within the British imperial structure. With this model of nationhood came western conceptualizations of gender and sexuality that contrasted sharply with West African gender and family norms. As my analysis of "Marjorie Mensah" demonstrates, the western gender norms associated with the educated elites' vision of the nation did not

necessarily conform to British colonial conceptualizations of gender, particularly government and missionary education that encouraged African women's education in the areas of domestic science. While this kind of education had the potential to produce "westernized" and perhaps even "modern" housewives and mothers, and in turn, western nuclear families compatible with the elites' vision for the nation, it did not promote the type of womanhood that the elite were imagining as part of their nationalist project.

The image of African womanhood that the educated elite were striving to articulate through "Marjorie Mensah" was one of a woman skilled in domestic science and household management, and prepared to actively engage in issues that affected the national (social) body and spearhead campaigns for social reform. This idealized image of the African woman as part of "domestic" and "public" spheres freed the idealized African man (her counterpart) to focus on the "political" (as opposed to the "social"/"feminine") affairs of the "nation." The elites' vision of womanhood (and manhood) fit well with their united West African nation, again, a nation composed of a western-educated and engaged citizenry of men and women that had at its center a western monogamous couple and nuclear family.

As the controversy over "Marjorie's" identity (and the discussions of marriage that accompanied it) illustrate, elite constructions of gender and, in turn, sexuality, family and nation were highly contested. Readers' discussion of "Marjorie's" actual body, her existence as a "real" African woman, was a discussion about the social body. It is difficult to know if readers' objections to "Marjorie" and their involvement in the marriage debate led this same group of writers to re-think how they would introduce their preferred form of marriage and family into the social body. Certainly, "Marjorie" and the

discussions she inspired were critical to this history. Through her daily column and the controversy surrounding her identity, she helped to bring about a conversation about the social body and its reform. She inspired elite African woman and university- and locally-educated African men to participate in the re-making of society through the re-making of womanhood, marriage, and family in print.

Moreover, her presence provoked a very “modern,” that is, dialogic encounter in the newspapers that involved multiple actors from different backgrounds and perspectives engaged in debate over a wide-range of issues related to national life. As readers attacked the *Times*’s vision of modernity and womanhood through their questioning of “Marjorie’s” identity, they became engaged readers, writers, and citizens who participated in discussions of social reform and nationhood. In this way, and perhaps somewhat ironically, “Marjorie” stimulated dialogue between different sections of Accra’s reading public that led to a productive public discussion about issues that were central to the formation and substance of a future nation—gender, love, marriage, sexuality, family, and women, and further encouraged the development of an educated and active citizenry in Accra.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Rethinking Citizenship and Empire after 1935

At the end of the First World War, western powers had declared the nation a “natural” institution and the “right” of all human groups (the exception being the European colonies). Seizing this discourse, which was certainly not meant for their benefit, university-educated West Africans, first as students in London during the 1920s, and later as members of an educated urban elite in Accra during the 1930s, developed a particular form of West African nationalism wedded to concepts of imperial citizenship. Modeling their project on dominion nationalism, they urged the inclusion of British West Africa as a united self-governing nation within the British Empire. Their project involved imagining a West African nation, and creating a unifying identity that would bring a diverse group of men and women with different educational experiences and ethnicities into social and political relationships as members of a new national community. It also entailed their representation of a coherent image of a West African “public opinion” composed of the future citizens of a united West Africa, and the establishment of a (Anglophone) West African presence in colonial, African, imperial, and international worlds.

This cohort’s nationalism and citizenship developed within the West African public sphere, a constellation of clubs and newspapers that was part of the institutional geography of London and Accra, and that was a critical arena of political and cultural

production, and of citizenship. The West African public sphere functioned as an extra-governmental institution and the primary location in which western-educated West Africans performed the rites of their imperial citizenship by publishing their correspondence with colonial officials in their newspapers, holding public meetings, sending resolutions to the colonial and imperial governments and the British press, attending international and imperial conferences, and by engaging in self-help through founding an African-funded hostel in London and African schools and reading groups in Accra.

The united West African nation that this cohort of students proposed for the future of their home countries stood in sharp contrast to the “Africa” that Britain was creating through its policies of indirect rule. The new black imperial discourses, while drawing from “white” dominion arguments for the formation of a commonwealth and Versailles, was a composite of discourses and ideas the students encountered in their travels between metropole and colony. As we have seen, it incorporated a range of imperial, colonial, African, and international resources that included concepts of modern governments and citizens, internationalism and co-operation, national self-determination, self-help, racial equality, and ideas about civilization, modernity, and gender. The “modern” nation they envisioned was not a two-part structure divided between a foreign/colonial government and a so-called native administration. It was a singular and “modern” political structure governed by highly-educated men like themselves. At its core was an educated and engaged citizenry of men and women, and, critically, a monogamous couple and nuclear family that could reproduce the national body. Their nation, unlike the colonial structure, would not be confined to the urban cities of the coastal area of British West Africa, but

encompassed the entire region (that is, the four British territories, including colonial and protectorate areas). The citizens of their imagined West African nation would develop a shared repertoire of social practices (mainly around education, marriage and family), and would abide by a singular legal code. All citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity would aspire to the formation of a (non-ethnic based) national identity.

In their speeches and magazine articles, WASU students emphasized their role in West Africa's "achieving" nationhood. They argued that it was their duty to educate the world about Africa, and to guide the people of (British) West Africa into the "modern" world. Thus, while in London they lobbied the colonial government for additional schools and for a university in West Africa. On returning to Accra the founded newspapers that accommodated exchanges between a diversity of readers and that helped showcase an emergent educated citizenry.

While in their public discussions West African students were hopeful about their future prospects within the British Empire, they recognized that a number of obstacles stood in the path of their achieving self-government. Racism continued to inform imperial policy as illustrated by the uneven concessions granted to the "white" dominions and India after the First World War and by the establishment of a British Commonwealth composed of the United Kingdom and the "white" dominion governments during the 1930s. Another practical concern and potential problem impeding the cohort's realization of their vision for West Africa was the uneven spread of western education in their home countries. The majority of the population of British West Africa was not educated in English and had not traveled or studied abroad. More importantly, they did

not share the same aspirations, ideals, and expectations for the future of West Africa as the university-educated African elite.

In London, WASU students had the advantage of being outside the colonial structure making it easy to pursue their political agenda unencumbered by the direct influence of African chiefs, colonial administrators, and locally-educated Africans in the colonies. While this group was composed of students from all parts of British West Africa, and from different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds, they shared similar understandings of gender, respectability, modernity, marriage, and family. Their common perspectives on these issues freed the students from internal arguments about certain social and cultural dimensions of their project for the future of West Africa. Thus, their political and cultural work in London required the performance of an educated and “modern” West African identity for British and world audiences within imperial and international presses, clubs, and conferences. In their club magazine, the students published research articles on different aspects of the history and “traditions” of the four territories that made-up British West Africa. At the same time that they actively educated one another about the various peoples of West Africa and negotiated a singular image and West African identity. They sent their club magazine to the Colonial Office and to the British Library in London. They sold copies on the streets of New York with the intention of presenting to the world a new image of Africa and educating world audiences about (Anglophone) West Africa.

In many ways, the political and cultural projects that developed in Accra were more complex than the projects the students had formed in London. The western-educated group of Accra was composed of people from different ethnic groups and with

different educational experiences. The diversity of the reading and club-going public made the project of defining nationhood more dynamic in Accra than it was in London. When WASU members attempted to carry out their political and cultural projects in Accra, they discovered that not all sections of the educated group agreed with their ideas about gender, sexuality, modernity, and family. They could no longer speak on behalf of an abstract “West Africa.” Their efforts to realize a West African nation in Accra focused less on promoting “West Africa,” and more on the practical work of creating West Africans. To this end, they used all aspects of the press: gendered columns, editorials, and letters to the editor, to “educate” locally-educated men and women about how to be West Africans. These efforts included “lessons” in appropriate dress and behavior in public (most of which targeted women, though the habits of young men, especially as related to their sex lives were also discussed), alongside examples of “respectable” courtship practices and their interpretation of “modern” marriages and families. Their advice to readers on how to be the new citizens of West Africa met with fierce resistance that involved heated debates in the press between former WASU members and locally-educated readers (mainly men) on gender, love, marriage, and family—issues that I argue were central to western-educated Africans’ articulation of nationhood and citizenship.

Thus, university-educated Africans’ political projects in the colonies focused on grooming an already growing community of locally-educated men and women for their future participation in the nation as modern citizens. They used the popular press and public controversies to entice these men to participate in public discussions of “modern” social problems, and to become even more engaged citizens. This was not difficult to

achieve. By the 1920s, locally-educated Accrans had founded their own clubs, and were actively participating in public debate in newspapers.

But, not all members of the educated group, namely locally-educated Africans, agreed with the gender and family norms that were foundational to the elites' vision of the nation, and most were not in a position to follow these norms. The near absence of women from the locally-educated group made it difficult for men to find educated women partners who conformed to the image of African womanhood held up by the elite, and without these women, the educated elite could not achieve their vision of a modern nation composed of educated couples and families. As I argue in Chapter 6, the educated elites' invention of the "New Woman" as African, through the fictional "Marjorie Mensah" in the *West Africa Times*, was absolutely tied to the elites' nationalist project. The fictional "Marjorie" was meant to serve as a model of modern gender roles for locally-educated readers, and was a tool for the elite to push their own vision of a modern nation. For British audiences, "Marjorie" was meant as a sign of the educated group's modern citizenry and, therefore, an important part of their argument for self-government.

While university-educated men and women stimulated public discourse on social problems among all readers in the press, they were deeply invested in shoring up an elite identity and in ensuring their leadership and control over the new nation that was in the making. They controlled the press and they strategically used sections of it (particularly the gendered columns) to construct their identity against the locally-educated group, defining themselves as Accra "Society," an "exclusive" set of educated professionals. As leaders of "Society" they further distinguished themselves from British administrators, arguing that they were responsible for further modernizing this group of locally-educated

readers. Through their discussions and representations of women and locally-educated men in the press, they attempted to carve out a distinctive and distinguished position for themselves in the modern urban world of Accra.

In establishing themselves as the rightful representatives of a modern West Africa, the educated elite discussed African chiefs as relics from the past, or as part of the colonial structure. But, at other times, they courted the chiefs as patrons and attempted to persuade them to adopt standardized practices and ideas around gender norms, sexuality, marriage, and family. While they made efforts to work with chiefs, they did not perceive the chieftaincy as capable of guiding West Africa into a “new age.” Chiefs did not have a part to play in the educated elites’ understanding of modern nationhood. They subscribed to ethnic categories and divisions, were fragmented in their political policies, supported polygamous and monogamous marriages, and had ties to the colonial government. The educated elites’ plans for the new nation had as its foundation a non-ethnic national identity, and a western-style model of gender, marriage, and family. The question of how to integrate these aspects of their nation with existing structures would continue to dominate the educated elites’ engagement with chiefs and the locally-educated into the post-colonial period.

* * *

At the end of 1934, a new transformation was underway within the West African public sphere. At this time, the *West Africa Times* was preparing to close its doors, and a new group of university-educated Africans were arriving in Accra. Nigerian Nnamdi

Azikiwe settled in Accra after completing his education in the United States. The Gold Coast entrepreneur A. J. Ocansey had requested his help with opening a new newspaper, the *African Morning Post*. Around the same time, Sierra Leonean I.T.A. Wallace Johnson moved to Accra after editing the communist journal the *Negro Worker* in Germany, and studying at the People's University in Russia. Wallace-Johnson was not from an elite family and had studied at a mission school sporadically while he worked to support his family in Sierra Leone. His employment for the Elder Dempster shipping company enabled him to travel the world. He worked for the *African Morning Post* and other papers as a freelance writer. Alongside Azikiwe, he was expelled from the Gold Coast after publishing what the colonial government deemed a seditious article in the *Post*. Both men came to the city with educational experiences, political ideas, and strategies for resisting colonialism that were different from the cohort that had arrived in the city from London only a few years earlier. Although a number of similarities connected the *West Africa Times* and the *African Morning Post*, the *Post* consciously pursued a future for West Africa outside the colonial situation, in this case arguing for the formation of a "New Africa," and was influenced by African American and Anglophone Caribbean discussions of communism and racial equality.

Less than a few months after the establishment of the *African Morning Post*, Italy invaded Ethiopia for the second time, and the League of Nations, the political institution that the West African students in London (as well as many other colonized groups) had looked to as hope for the future of Africa and the world, failed to intervene in the crisis. This was a transformative event for western-educated West Africans. It prompted them to re-evaluate their ideas about what was possible within western-dominated international

and imperial frameworks. As these students soon discovered, international political structures, despite advancements made by “non-western” countries (India, Japan, and China) in the early twentieth century, continued to be organized along racial lines. This fact further demonstrated that the problem of the twentieth century, as W. E. B. Du Bois diagnosed at the beginning of the century, was the “problem of the colour line.”⁶⁸⁶

My detailed analysis of the political and cultural productions of western-educated Africans during the years prior to this transformation, 1925 to 1935, offers the possibility of a comparative analysis of the political endeavors of different cohorts of educated Africans. Moreover, it argues strongly for a re-examination of how historians have conceptualized different moments within the history of Anglophone West African nationalism. It suggests that the nationalist projects that developed at the beginning of the twentieth century were very different from those that formed after the First World War, and different again from those that formed after the Second Italo–Abyssinian War. By looking closely at the political projects and practices that developed during these various moments in the history of West African nationalism, it is possible to draw comparisons between these periods, and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the history of Anglophone West Africa and its decolonization. My dissertation also shows how different educational experiences shaped the kinds of projects that western-educated Africans pursued in the colonies, and argues for the examination of projects developed in the colonies within the context that connected them to London and other parts of the world. By bringing Africans’ educational experiences abroad into a discussion of the

⁶⁸⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “To the Nations of the World,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 639.

nationalist projects that formed in the colonies we can begin to see how these experiences influenced the events that took place in the colonial and post-colonial periods.

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