



The Cocoa Complex

Spatialized Value in Ghanaian Cocoa Production

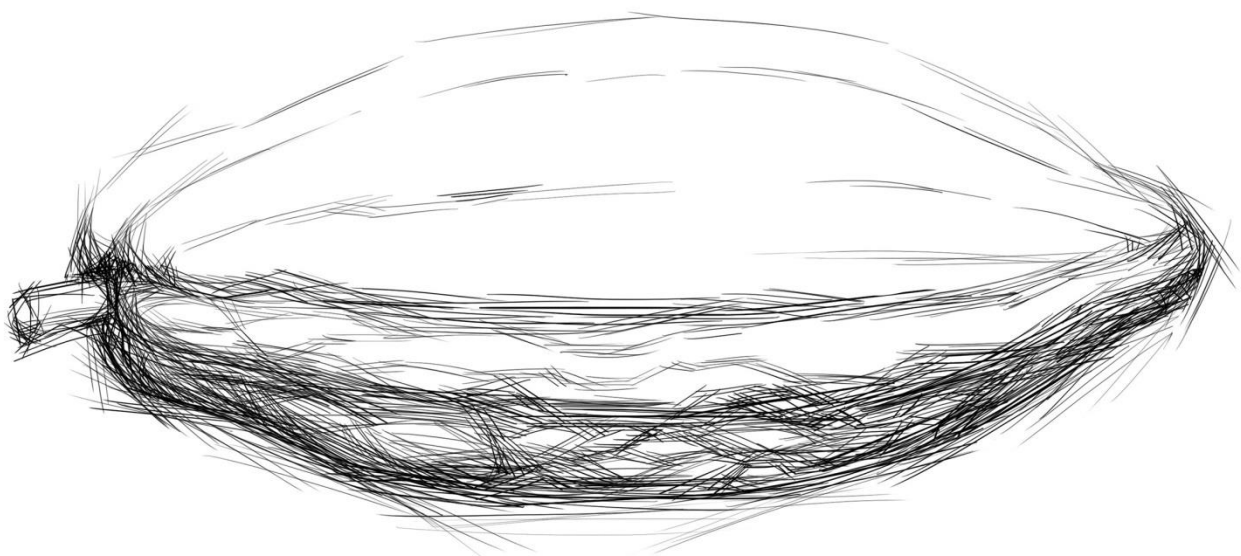
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PhD Thesis

Martin Arvad Nicolaisen

The Cocoa Complex

- Spatialized Value in Ghanaian Cocoa Production

Principal supervisor: Signe Mellemgaard

Co-supervisor: Frida Hastrup

Submitted: August 6th 2018

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THE COCOA COMPLEX – SPATIALIZED VALUE IN GHANAIAN COCOA PRODUCTION

PHD THESIS

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Name of department: Department of Ethnology, Saxo Institute

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Title and subtitle: The Cocoa Complex – Spatialized Value in Ghanaian Cocoa Production

Topic description: Analysis of the processes through which cocoa as a natural good attains value and significance to people across contemporary Southwestern Ghana. Development for this purpose of an analytical term the author of this thesis calls ‘spatialized value’.

Principal supervisor: Signe Mellemgaard, Associate Professor

Co-supervisor: Frida Hastrup, Associate Professor

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ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

For more than a Century cocoa has constituted the primary export crop of both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, yet the consumption of chocolate products has remained very low across both nations. Focusing on Ghana in particular this thesis attempts to answer the question of how then cocoa attains value and significance to people if not as a consumable good?

The theoretical frame for this work is primarily a critical discussion of a number of academic approaches to 'value', on the basis of which the thesis' author proposes to engage the analytical term 'spatialized value'. This term implies the identification of numerous boundary enactments that serve in different ways to delimit or enable the spaces of significance and value affordable to the natural good which both the anthropologist and his informants recognize as 'cocoa'. The thesis thus discusses a number of situations in which cocoa is valued in terms of shifting spatial capacities.

In terms of ethnographic material, this thesis is based on engagements with farmers on cocoa plantations and communities in the direct vicinity of the southern Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire border, talks with rural cocoa depot workers and border officials, journeys with cross-country cocoa truckers, and interviews with portside government officials. The thesis seeks to investigate the contemporary Ghanaian cocoa production practices through notions of spatiality and time borne out of both colonial legacies and pre-colonial traditions, an inquiry that entails land disputes, religious devotion, practices of corruption, and more.

What emerges through the analysis is a nuanced insight into cocoa as a complex locus for generating meaning and value among people of southwestern Ghana of the early Twenty-first Century – a picture that takes the reader much beyond any simple ideas of a neat global commodity chain.

RESUMÉ PÅ DANSK

Gennem mere end hundrede år har kakao været den største eksportafgrøde fra såvel Ghana som Elfenbenskysten, men dog er forbruget af chokoladeprodukter i begge disse lande forblevet lavt. Med særligt fokus på Ghana forsøger denne afhandling at besvare spørgsmålet om, på hvilke måder kakao i stedet opnår værdi og betydning for lokale mennesker hvis ikke som et forbrugsgode?

Den teoretiske ramme for dette værk baserer sig primært på en kritisk diskussion af en række akademiske tilgange til 'værdi', og på denne baggrund foreslår denne afhandlings forfatter brugen af en analytisk term kaldet 'spatialiseret værdi'. Denne term indebærer identifikationen af talrige grænsedragende handlinger, der på forskellig vis hindrer eller muliggør de rumlige udfoldelser, indenfor hvilke betydninger og værdi kan tillægges den naturlige råvare, som både antropologen og dennes informanter genkender som 'kakao'. Denne afhandling diskuterer derfor en række situationer, hvorigennem kakao værdisættes i kraft af skiftende rumlige kapaciteter.

Med hensyn til etnografisk materiale så er den nærværende afhandling baseret på interaktioner med bønder på kakaoplantager og i lokalsamfund i umiddelbar nærhed af den sydlige landegrænse mellem Ghana og Elfenbenskysten. Dertil kommer samtaler med arbejdere på kakaodepoter og med grænsevagter, køreture med lastvognschauffører på langtursruter for kakaotransport, samt dertil interviews med myndighedsrepræsentanter i havneområder. Afhandlingen tilstræber en udforskning af praksisser for nutidig ghanesisk kakaoproduktion gennem forståelser af rumligheder og tidsligheder, der fremkommer på baggrund af såvel eftervirkninger fra kolonitiden samt prækoloniale traditioner, en undersøgelse der involverer stridigheder om landrettigheder, religiøse forståelser, praksisser for udøvelse af korruption, med mere.

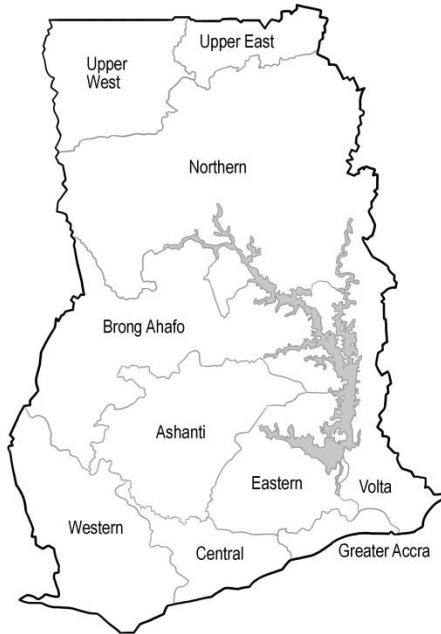
Gennem afhandlingens analyse fremkommer et nuanceret indblik i kakaoens rolle som et kompliceret knudepunkt for dannelser af mening og værdi blandt mennesker i det sydvestlige Ghana i det tidlige enogtyvende århundrede – en skildring der bringer læseren langt videre end simple forståelser af en pænt organiseret global forsyningskæde.

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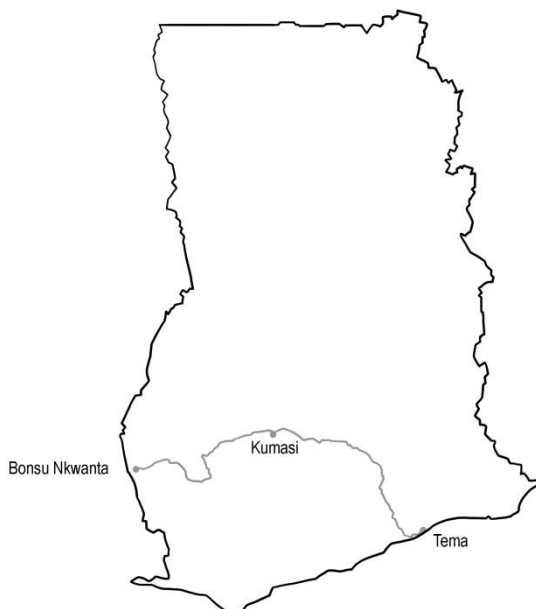
MAPS OF GHANA



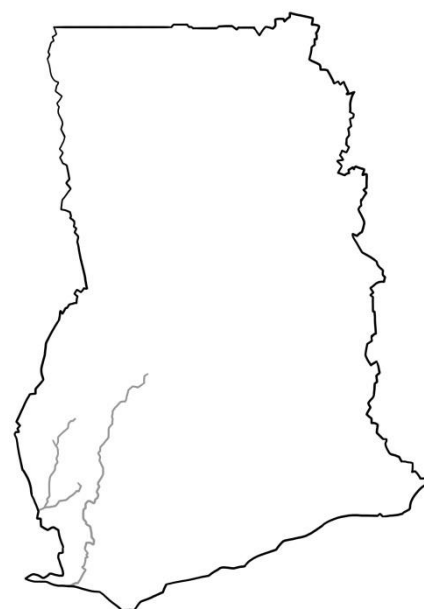
Map 1: Administrative regions of contemporary Ghana.



Map 2: Approximate indication of the Sefwi traditional tribal area.

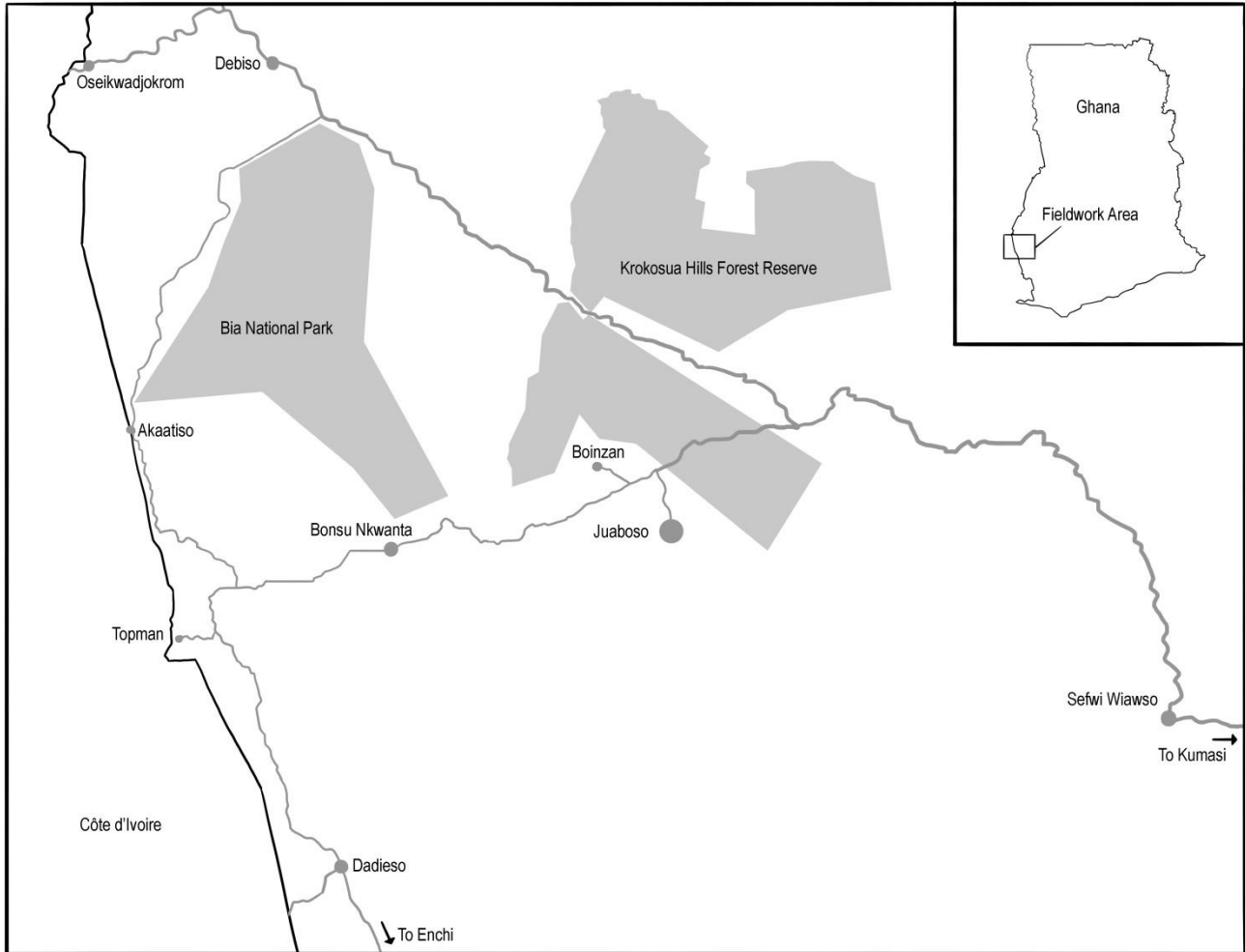


Map 3: The typically preferred transport route for cocoa trucks between Bonsu Nkwanta and Tema.



Map 4: The River Bia and its tributaries passing through the western part of Sefwi and the River Tano passing through the eastern part.

MAP OF PRIMARY ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AREA



Map 5: The westernmost part of the Sefwi traditional area along with a section of the boundary line towards Côte d'Ivoire. On the map are indicated only the names of communities and certain other locations that comprise central parts of the ethnographic analysis of this thesis, or which serves as convenient regional orientation points. While numerous other communities and roads also exist through this geographical area, these have however been omitted here for the sake of clarity.

FOREWORD

The present thesis constitutes my main contribution to a collaborative academic research project at the Department of Ethnology of the Saxo Institute of Copenhagen University. The overall research project titled ‘Natural Goods? Processing Raw Materials in Global Times’ has aimed to combine insights from the fields of ethnology, anthropology, and cultural history in order to explore the practices through which people at different places and times have worked together to extract and process materials that subsequently appear as particular raw and pure natural goods. This project has been headed by Associate Professor, Frida Hastrup, and each of the four researchers of the project group has focused on one particular natural good as such emerges in a particular setting¹. In this regard this thesis draws upon a number of insights generated through the works of my closest academic project colleagues (see for instance, Hastrup 2018, 2014; Brichet, 2014, 2012; Andersen 2014), and the development of my own ethnographic ruminations in the present context is an attempt to contribute to the project group’s overall discussion of natural goods as entities that emerge as co-produced rather than pre-given. The many fruitful discussions I have shared with my project team members, fellow Saxo Institute PhD students, and other department colleagues – not least my main advisor, Associate Professor, Signe Mellemgaard – have likewise greatly helped to shape this analytical enquiry into its present shape, and for this I owe them all big thanks. I also want to express a particular thanks to geographer Michael Helt Knudsen, whose personal words of advice to me based on his own prior field studies in Juaboso District of Ghana – and especially around the frontier town of Bonsu Nkwanta – have greatly helped me situate and sharpen my own ethnographic inquiry right from the beginning.

From the Ghanaian side I likewise have many people to thank, first and foremost my primary fieldwork assistant, Eric Opoku, whose wide ranging knowledge on regional matters in Juaboso District and personal cocoa farming experiences proved invaluable for the first stages of my research in 2014. Likewise, I owe a particular thanks to journalist, Monsieur Pascal of Radio Rainbow FM in Juaboso, who assisted me with guidance and French and Aowin translations during a short supplementary fieldwork period on the Côte d’Ivoire side of the border in 2014. In the Ghanaian cocoa transport sector I particularly wish to thank the trucking trio of Ali, Muhammed, and Prince, who so generously invited me to share their already crammed truck cab space with them on what turned out to be one particularly eventful and challenging cross-country journey, parts which have come to feature as

¹ For more information on the overall Natural Goods project, please see: <http://naturalgoods.saxo.ku.dk/>

central case material in the present thesis. Many other people across Ghana have likewise earned my deep gratitude for their help in providing me insights into the many nuances and controversies of the nation's cocoa sector, yet due to the sensitivity of a lot of this information, their names shall better remain anonymous in the present context. I hope that each of those persons and groups “who all know themselves” will likewise recognise themselves and their own significant contributions inside this text. Named as unnamed, my thanks go out to you all.

INTRODUCTION

Cocoa is often described as a specific type of raw foodstuff, a consumable ingredient, and a particular product of nature. Such objective classifications contain a number of rarely explicit assumptions of clear physical and conceptual separation from the surroundings and of something that has been reduced to its finest essence. Such an understanding of cocoa is often sufficient in commercial settings, in the laboratory, or in the supermarket where cocoa to the people dealing with it becomes knowable as a singular entity.

However, as this thesis will demonstrate through an ethnography of cocoa in a West African setting, cocoa can also be understood as a dynamic set of value-charged relations rather than as any kind of singularly definable raw material. To arrive at this finding, I have sought out and identified numerous fieldwork situations in which cocoa becomes ascribed with meaning and notions of value through encounters with other inanimate materials, living beings, and other recognized structures and entities. My approach has been to look for boundaries around cocoa in order to explore, materially and immaterially, what cocoa both can and cannot be in my specific fieldwork context. Through the lens of conceptual boundaries, I thus explore how cocoa gets made as a composite valuable resource, as it travels across different spheres of activity, transgressing, performing, reproducing, contesting categories along the way. The theoretical onsets for this project come primarily from various social scientific approaches to notions of ‘value’ combined with various works exploring ideas of movement, boundaries, and spaces. To anticipate, in this thesis I explore Ghanaian cocoa as a matter of ‘spatialized value’ – my overall analytical term meant to capture cocoa as a set of relations that make it emerge as valuable as it crosses different boundaries on its way from tree to chocolate.

Boundaries of the Borderlands

So, how does cocoa emerge as a valuable natural good in the rural borderlands of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire? The cocoa cultivation in these areas takes place throughout most of the space available for agricultural purposes, and the question of what cocoa is and becomes to the people who make their livelihoods from it here is closely related to the ways it brushes up against – and permeates across the boundaries set to regulate and confine its flow. Therefore, below the seemingly uniform

foliage of the evergreen cocoa tree canopies one finds an intricate and dynamic pattern of processes woven over time across the space of actions between people and other living beings that work to shape, reproduce, transgress, and transform what cocoa is or may become. To understand cocoa in this field, I contend, necessitates an understanding of the boundaries reproduced there, one of which is the national boundary line separating Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. I will for this reason start out the introduction to the topic and the setting of the analysis through an ethnographic focal point placed on one of the many rural town communities situated in the vicinity of this border.

Akaatiso is a bustling small town situated right at the boundary line between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire on the southwestern side of the Bia National Park/Resource Reserve in Western Region of Ghana. In 2014 the town could still not boast of any electricity, running water, organized waste treatment, or paved roads, but accommodation charges for non-local travellers were on the other hand very reasonable compared to the rest of the region. There was a freshly built rudimentary police station in the town, sponsored by the elected town chief in a bid to try and lobby the regional authorities to assign police officers to the community, so far without success. The armed garrison of Ghanaian immigrations and customs officials along with their colleagues directly across on the Ivoirian side of the town were at the time of my stay still the only law enforcements present.

The official border crossing in Akaatiso consists on the Ghanaian side of a couple of simple plastered brick buildings with corrugated tin roofs; one painted in two shades of blue colours housing the local CEPS (Customs Excise and Preventive Service) unit of the Ghana Revenue Authority, and the other building painted in shades of green housing the locally stationed PBU (Border Patrol Unit) members of the GIS (Ghana Immigration Services) district garrison². Immediately across on the Ivoirian side an open-sided building provides shelter against the sun to the border protection personnel stationed there as well as to their motorbikes, and next to it stands a customs building in green, yellow, turquoise and sandy white that serves a matching purpose as the one on the Ghanaian side. The Ghanaian customs officers check all travellers for taxable or contraband goods that they might be carrying across, while the immigration officers check the travellers' identification documents and provide armed enforcement of the border. The border crossing itself consists of a bare wooden gate frame set in an irregularly maintained wooden picket fence some 1.5m high and painted blue along the bottom and white on the top. The fence does not extend more than a hundred metres or so in

² Specifically, this Akaatiso division of GIS officially belongs under the command of the GIS district headquarters situated at the larger border crossing of Oseikwadjokrom a couple of hours' drive to the North.

either direction before being replaced by a line of planted trees that indicate the continuation of the national boundary line beyond the town itself.

On a day in April 2014 Akaatiso was bustling with the news of a dramatic incident that had taken place the same morning. A driver of a mini truck from the town had been stopped at the local customs checkpoint near the Ivoirian border. Normally this driver would pay something to the officer present so that he could pass by with his cargo of cocoa beans undeclared into Côte d'Ivoire, but today the officer was accompanied at his post by a newly assigned colleague whom, as I was told, he did not yet completely trust. For this reason the officer chose to refuse the usual cash bribe and acted instead as if he had never met the driver before. The driver took offence to this cold treatment and the embarrassment of being openly rejected with cash in hand, and he furthermore became agitated at the prospect of having his truck inspected for contraband goods. The situation quickly turned into a quarrel and from there escalated into a physical fight where the officer, aided by his new colleague, eventually beat up the driver.

I was initially told this story during lunchbreak that same day at small cocoa farm outside of Akaatiso. There I had joined a handful of town residents who were assisting an elderly local farmer with the harvest of cocoa pods on his farm. A relative of the farmer rode in from town on a bicycle and brought everyone lunch prepared by the farmer's wife. While people sat around and ate the visitor excitedly shared the fresh gossip.

According to the story of the incident, after the rough beating the driver lay bloodied and with torn clothing on the middle of the dirt road. In his angry frustration the driver proceeded to shout a curse [duabɔ]³ at the officer by rubbing his naked bottom on the ground while saying that the River Bia would take the officer. This, according to local beliefs, evoked a strong curse implying that the officer would now likely not have long left to live.

The officer, however, did not immediately take the driver's words seriously and shouted haughtily back at him that he was not afraid of the river.

At this point in the account the farm workers listening together with me made audible gasps and shook their heads while muttering disapproving comments. As one of them later explained to me, the officer

³ Twi term for 'the act of cursing'; the curse as a noun was instead referred to as [dua]. Both Twi and the regionally prevalent Sefwi are dialects of the same Akan language group shared by the populations across all of contemporary south-western Ghana and parts of south-eastern Côte d'Ivoire (Hall 2010 [1983]).

had just made the situation much worse by adding his own challenging reply to the River. Now, for sure, the River Bia would come and kill him.

Later in the morning, as our lunchbreak messenger continued, the officer had started to feel physically unwell and became increasingly afraid for his health. He therefore went first to the home of the driver and commanded him to lift the curse. The driver, still hurt and angry, refused to do this, so the officer had then continued on to consult the town chief and the elders and request their help to settle the affair and lift the curse.

The lunchtime gossip ended here at this rather suspenseful point. Back in town again around sunset other local residents filled me and the other returning farm workers in on the subsequent developments of the day:

The town chief had become very annoyed at hearing about this incident, since he had previously prohibited curses from being made in the community. The chief called the driver and the officer to his palace and asked for a fine of 1.000 Ghanaian Cedis (GH¢) to be paid by them for this curse incident, an amount which he was however willing to lower to 600 GH¢. The driver said that he did not have that kind of money and in fact only owned 200 GH¢. The officer then suggested that they pay 300 GH¢ each, which the driver rejected by stating he did not want to pay anything, since it was the officer's unfair beating of him that had driven him to say the curse in the first place, and so to his view the officer ought to pay the whole fine himself. This put further pressure on the officer, since he very much wanted the curse to be lifted, while he also did not have the money to pay the entire fine.

Additional attempts at reaching a settlement were made over the course of the day, and eventually through the assistance of friends and family networks a sufficient amount of money was raised to cover the fine. Some of this money was then passed from the chief to his primary linguist, an elderly man skilled in communication with the spirit world. The linguist spent the money on the purchase of ritual ingredients which enabled him to go down to the River Bia and talk to it, presenting appeasement offerings while carefully explaining the misunderstandings behind the curse, so that the River in turn would agree to lift the curse and not kill the officer after all.



Image 1: A part of the River Bia in its material form. Photo taken by author near Addaikrom village, Juaboso District, Ghana. March 2014.

This event expresses a number of different locally perceived boundaries, the appearance and transgression of which are bound up with cocoa and farming on this frontier of southwestern Ghana. Throughout this area knowledge of, adherence to, and at times deliberate transgressions of various physical and conceptual boundaries constitute important aspects of the ways in which people attempt to manoeuvre themselves forward in life under circumstances characterised by scarce access to resources, such as education, money, consumable goods, and access to available farmland. The incident that happened between the customs officers and the truck driver, and subsequently the larger local community, revolved around their mutual acknowledgement of the presence of a number of different significant boundaries, and I have chosen to open the thesis with the recounting of this particular case, since I find that each of these boundaries indicates ways in which cocoa attains value throughout this region. Some boundaries served as *de facto* permeable markers of difference that enabled the creation of value in the form of monetary profit from cocoa. Meanwhile other boundaries worked to limit the growth, movement, and potential value attributions of the same. In the following few passages I will first present an initial outline of some of the boundaries actualized through the opening ethnographic case, before proceeding to introduce the larger empirical and analytical scope of the thesis.

First, running through Akaatiso and beyond there is the physical imposition of the geographical boundary line separating the nations of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. This politically founded line imposes a basic distinction between people inhabiting the surrounding areas as being either Ghanaian or Ivoirian national citizens. Furthermore this line has provided some people with employment at this place as immigrations and customs officers, relegating others to the roles of civilian border area inhabitants and border-crossing travellers, or in some cases, cross-border smugglers. This particular national boundary, however, as the story of the incident relates, has been locally known to be quite permeable through the payments of monetary bribes, dependant on whether or not freshly arrived officers have also passed the threshold of trust that allows them into the circle of confidentiality among financially corrupted senior border personnel.

The incident revolves around monetary price boundaries too, since the bags of cocoa beans that the driver carried would fetch a larger sum of money if sold on the Ivoirian side than on the Ghanaian side, where government policies have kept the prices fixed at a lower level⁴. The Ghanaian government holds a long-running state monopoly on exports of cocoa, consequently prohibiting all private actors from moving these types of goods across the borders of the nation. The events on this particular day prevented the driver from passing the border at all, but had he succeeded in doing so, he may have reaped sizeable profits from the sale of his cocoa. Furthermore, it may have been to his subsequent advantage to attempt to reinvest the money earned in bags of Ivoirian cocoa fertilizer that could then be brought back across the border and sold at a profit in Ghana. In the 2014-15 seasons government subsidized cocoa fertilizers were widely reported to be in short supply throughout several areas of Ghana, but the ready availability of Ivoirian originated fertilizers in parts of the Ghanaian southwestern borderlands suggested that this shortage was, at least partially, mitigated by imports⁵.

Another boundary made apparent from the incident concerns anti-corruption measures and the long-running practice of the Ghanaian public sector to appoint government officials to positions in parts of the country different from the ones in which those persons originated. While the driver was known as a local resident, each of the two officers involved had come from elsewhere.

⁴ These differences will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 1 of the present thesis.

⁵ Such shortages of agricultural inputs are not limited to this particular time period only but have recurrently taken place in Ghana since the initiation of structural reforms in the 1990s for the purposes of increased cocoa market liberalisation (Amanor 1999: 38-39).

Additionally, officials would be expected to be rotated to other job placements every four to five years⁶. These measures, as multiple government workers have informed me, were put in place to curb potential temptations toward nepotism or corruption among government employees. Still, in the case of the described incident at least a partial bond of trust had nevertheless been established between the local driver and the senior non-local official posted there. The collusion between them however turned out not to be strong enough to withstand the arrival of a new customs officer with still unknown allegiances. Instead, the otherwise obsolete social boundary between local civilian and non-local officials became instantly reinstated again through the senior officer's denial of familiarity towards the driver, to the ultimate chagrin of both persons involved.

Finally, the further complications of the unfortunate incident also explicate a locally acknowledged existence of a foundational distinction between a material and a spiritual realm of existence⁷, the latter represented by the ensouled River Bia. The boundary between these two realms is in turn considered as permeable through the evocation of curses as well as the ritual offering of gifts. The oral and somatic gestures of the agitated beaten driver were recognised by members of the local community to have successfully reached beyond the boundaries of the material realm and enabled powers from the spiritual realm to transgress into and cause harm in the human physical world. The River Bia would therefore, as expected by many community members of Akaatiso, reach beyond its own regular boundaries to 'take' the cursed officer. This looming transgressive spirit act apparently required another powerful boundary crossing human act to undo: a 'linguist' skilled in communication with the spiritual realm had to make ritual appeasement offerings to the River Bia and through carefully chosen words thereby attempt to counteract the initial reckless words and actions of the driver and the officer that had caused the dangerous situation to arise.

Taken together, then, I suggest that this case exemplifies a few of the numerous boundaries, solid, permeable, and overlapping, that all influence the livelihoods of people around Akaatiso and the surrounding geographical areas of this 'final cocoa frontier' of Ghana, as it has been described (Knudsen & Fold (2011). See also Berry (2008); Amanor (2008)). These boundaries simultaneously afford a certain physical and conceptual range to people, within which cocoa cultivation and related commercial activities can be undertaken, and concurrently create certain contingently,

⁶ And to be more specific, stationed GIS officers are routinely rotated between the handful or so different border crossing posts within each of their assigned districts, in addition to their larger periodic redeployments to other border districts elsewhere in the country.

⁷ On this cosmology, see for instance Meyer (2015); McCaskie (1995); Minkus (1980); Meyerowitz (1951).

spatially bound ranges for meaning and value association. Through the chapters of this thesis, I will explore Ghanaian cocoa by focusing on the constitution of such materially and immaterially expressed boundaries. As I will introduce more fully below, such boundary enactments express solid, permeable, and overlapping qualities, which produce what I shall propose to term the ‘spatialized value’ of cocoa.

Introducing the Scope of Analysis

In rural Ghana, cocoa production might at first glance seem to be all about cocoa as a particular type of natural good and the conversion of such into money. The people who cultivate it, transport it, and sell it tend to express little to no interest in cocoa as a consumable item, but curiously, neither are they quick to circumscribe its importance in absolute objective terms such as money, weight, or quality types. Rather, during fieldwork, I found either a deliberate lack of talking about numerical value terms, or, when numbers were mentioned, they were often applied either loosely or in deliberately obfuscating ways. How could this be? The reason, I will argue, has to do with a common emphasis on the preservation of indeterminacy as a particular way for Ghanaians to cope with difficult conditions of life characterized by a scarcity of material resources and livelihood opportunities, widespread practices of corruption, a recent history of social upheaval, and the contemporary mixture of cultural influences from both near and afar. Ghanaian cocoa production is deeply entangled in all of these circumstances, and it is a commonly held wisdom that full openness about the true extent of one’s available resources only makes one more prone to losing it all. Instead, careful manoeuvring and partial displays of one’s assets lead to a safer way forward towards ambitions of obtaining material wealth and higher social status. Cocoa, in this setting, becomes a means towards achieving various goals of a better life, and my suggestion is that cocoa therefore becomes charged as a peculiar locus of potentiality, the dimensions and outer bounds of which, however, remain surreptitiously dynamic and deliberately underdetermined until the points when it is exchanged for cash or favours.

Crucially, this means that studies employing quantitatively based methods to explore the dimensions of value generation across the Ghanaian cocoa business face a significant obstacle, as numerical expressions are frequently obfuscated and rendered imprecise, whether one enquires into what may be seen as illegal, dubious, or even entirely mundane aspects of people’s work and livelihoods⁸. In consequence, I find that important insights can be gained if one approaches cocoa as a

⁸ For instance, Michael Helt Knudsen who has conducted geographical PhD fieldwork in Juaboso District (the same administrative district as the majority of this thesis is based in), reports that quantitative research in this

natural good, the value of which is generated through multiple dimensions, only one of which concerns decidedly commercial transactions. Accordingly, this thesis will suggest that value creation through the Ghanaian cocoa sector is better understood as something that dynamically involves the spatial dimensions of the material good and its production of contexts. Centrally, I have found it necessary to identify an analytical approach that is suitable for conditions where numerical boundary indications are both true and false, and where it remains an open secret among my informants that real value is generated in the marginal spaces between boundaries as formally represented and boundaries as surreptitiously performed.

To explore cocoa in this sense as an intentionally vague mass of potential, continuously shaped through the interplays between overt and covert boundary enactments, I develop an analytical term I call ‘spatialized value’. This term is an attempt to build on the traditions of previous social scientific studies of value that have tended to approach the concept of value either as an intrinsic quality of a particular good or as the actualisation of difference during events of exchange. This thesis proposes that it makes sense to treat the value of Ghanaian cocoa as materializing both of these features⁹.

Sources of Inspiration from Regional and Theoretical Literature

As a way to frame the present ethnographic exploration of the characteristically secretive cocoa business, I have found inspiration from, among other sources, anthropologist Brenda Chalfin. Chalfin has studied the dynamics between people and regulatory frameworks in several parts of Ghana, including local market traders of the shea nut business of north-eastern Ghana (Chalfin 2000), as well as studies among officials at Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana (Chalfin 2010, 2008). One of Chalfin’s insights has been to “pose the perceived corruption of [Ghanaian] public officials such as customs officers, not as a ‘problem to be solved’ [...] but, first and foremost, as a problem to be understood, with complex political, economic, and cultural underpinnings and effects.” (Chalfin 2010:

local context is hampered by A) a lack of tradition for recording exact numbers. B) landholding measurement systems that have changed over the years, and informants would frequently refer implicitly to different units of measurements based on ropes, miles, poles, or acres. C) Suspicion and caution among informants that frequently made such persons lie or intentionally underestimate numerical expressions of their assets during interviews (Knudsen 2008: 55).

⁹ All of this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

XV). Similarly, rather than attempting to uncover purported ‘truths’ or ‘facts’ hidden behind people’s practices of secrecy, I have instead made it the scope of this thesis to explore some of the ways in which the many boundaries, material as immaterial, formal as informal, shape and shroud the Ghanaian cocoa business with images of secrecy, profitability, and corruption.

Inspired in part by anthropologist David Graeber’s use of Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistics to theorise value as ‘meaningful difference’ (Graeber 2001) coupled with anthropologist Jane Guyer’s term ‘marginal gains’ (Guyer 2004), I explore how people’s notions of value lead to fuzzily bounded notions of space. The spatial aspect of my approach meanwhile draws in part on insights from the ‘spatial turn’ in recent decades in African studies (Engel & Nugent 2010) and from the social scientific sources in general (Lefebvre 1991 [1974], Smith 2008 [1984], Munn 1986, Barth 1969).

For my main fieldwork area of Ghana, the Sefwi traditional region, the extensive research and publications by anthropologist Stefano Boni have been especially helpful due to his often pioneering documentation of Sefwi oral history and customs (Boni 2008, 2007, 2005, 2001, 2000, 1999). For insights into recent and contemporary conditions of cocoa cultivation in the westernmost parts of Sefwi, especially Juaboso District, articles by geographers Niels Fold (2004) and Michael Helt Knudsen (2010, 2008, 2007, Knudsen & Fold 2011), along with my personal conversations with them, have likewise contributed to the framing of my ethnographic fieldwork. On the topic of south Ghanaian cocoa farming and cultural traditions, works by Tsutomu Takane (2002), Kojo Amanor, (2008, 2007, 2001, 1999, 1996), Gareth Austin (2005, 1996, 1987), Ivor Wilks (1993, 1973), Thomas McCaskie (1995, 1986), Paul Nugent (2002), Sara Berry (2009, 2002, 2001), Polly Hill (1997[1963]), and Gwendolyn Mikell (1992) have also been important as a crucial contextualization of my work. For literature on Ghanaian and wider African border issues, works by Paul Nugent (2011, 2002, Engel & Nugent 2010, Nugent & Asiwaju 1996), Carola Lentz (2003), E. O. Saffu (1970), I. W. Zartman (1965) and others have likewise been significant. The specific dialogues with these and other sources will be introduced in the analyses that follow.

On Methodology

This thesis is primarily based on three periods of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ghana in 2014 and 2015, constituting in total about five months. Additionally, I have drawn on more than a decade of prior personal experiences from Ghana, where I have been involved in numerous development initiatives financed through the Danish governmental Danida (Danish International Development Assistance) agency. These involvements comprised both volunteer NGO work since 2002 at regional and local community levels in Ghana's Northern Region, as well as a student internship with the BSPS (Business Sector Programme Support) unit at the Danish Embassy in Accra from 2008-09.

My present and most recent ethnographical material has been generated throughout a handful of districts in the southwestern rural frontier region bordering Côte d'Ivoire, as well as in the commercial port of Tema, the capital city of Accra, and along some of the road networks in between. I have attempted to follow cocoa beans from their origins in small farming communities in the Ghanaian and Ivorian borderlands and further along the so-called 'commodity chain' to the coast, interviewing numerous human stakeholders along the way, including farmers, border officials, depot workers, truckers, quality control officers, and many other private persons, business representatives, and government officials. In each case I have probed the dimensions and boundaries of people's engagements with cocoa, whether material (i.e. geographical boundaries, limits of job mandated activities, etc.) or immaterial (i.e. collaboration with certain others, barriers to trust, etc.).

My methodology has primarily been centred on engaging people through qualitative conversations while attempting to participate as much as possible in their work tasks in relation to cocoa. This has in practical terms entailed weeks of volunteering for various kinds of menial cocoa farming work along with multiple tag-alongs during short and long cocoa transportation activities, quality control procedures, GIS border patrols, and occasional development stakeholder interventions. In the case of information sought among highly ranked government and business officials it had proven necessary for me to proceed through formal time-constrained interviews, but even in such settings I strove for a conversational approach through a pre-made list of topics of interest rather than any fixed interview questionnaire. This purposely open-ended methodology enabled me to continuously remain open for the pursuit of surprising angles of information that would appear over the course of

such talks, an approach that corresponds well to what O'Reilly characterizes as 'iterative-inductive' research (O'Reilly 2012: 29-30).

In some cases in the remotest parts of rural southwestern Ghana, I relied on the help of local assistants to translate between Sefwi and English, as well as to locate road tracks and pathways to various village communities and individual farmsteads that could not be found through the available maps. Similarly, a shorter supplementary research around communities situated on the Ivoirian side of the border was also made possible through the helpfulness of local assistants who provided me with necessary translations between Sefwi, Aowin, French, and English.

Extensive note-taking and photography during participant observation provided another rich source of ethnographic material for the present thesis, as did the collection and documentation of several material items related to cocoa production in Ghana. The collection of such ethnographic items furthermore served the purpose of components for a planned subsequent ethnographic museum exhibition after the completion of the thesis.

A consequence of my chosen fieldwork methodology coupled with my analytical aspirations is a style of writing that does not attempt to hide the co-presence of the fieldworker. It would have been self-contradictory otherwise, I believe, since my argument goes that cocoa is continuously becoming what it is through encounters with other entities, which necessarily also includes the influence of the fieldworker asking, observing, reflecting, and in general being unavoidably present among those people who engage themselves with the natural good that both they and I call 'cocoa'. What will therefore emerge through the following is a text that by choice and by necessity weaves in and out of closely recounted events from the field combined with reflections from afar. The intentional brevity of this initial section on methodology and scholarly context will for this reason be compensated through more thorough discussions and reflections throughout the thesis.

Synopsis of the Thesis

This thesis argues that cocoa in Ghana attains value through numerous boundary making, boundary moving, and boundary transgressing activities. I have structured the work into five main chapters that each deals with a part of this boundary work. Together the five chapters establish the basis for my proposal that the value of cocoa can be understood as inherently spatial and dynamic.

Chapter 1 introduces the overall Ghanaian cocoa business through ethnographic focus on one particular cocoa farming community, situated in a remote part of the tropical southern Ghana – Côte d'Ivoire border zone. The marginality of this community, relative to the national authorities and the cocoa businesses of either country, helps me identify a number of issues that problematize understandings of cocoa as one essential type of natural good. Instead, the incommensurability of boundaries imposed around this place invites another view of cocoa as potentiality of value that can be variously realised.

Chapter 2 explores the movement of cocoa as a commercial product through the Ghanaian road networks from rural depots to the ports. By contrasting the work of truck drivers with that of portside logistics personnel I analyse how the supposedly same cocoa can be seen to emerge alternately as a solid material and as an abstract flow. I proceed to discuss these findings in relation to a number of academic approaches to the concept of value and conclude the chapter with substantiating the proposition that the value of cocoa moved through commodity chains can be gainfully understood as a series of boundary-making and boundary-traversing activities that include spatial dimensions.

Chapter 3 explores the multiple ways in which diverse regionally based notions of spatial boundaries influence cocoa cultivation in the rural southwestern Ghana. Based on research combining historical material from the region with examples from a number of old and recent ethnographic cases discussed by other academic researchers I attempt to outline how such physically and conceptually reproduced boundaries result in frequently contested and overlapping territorial claims, which in turn shape multiple opportunities and barriers for value generation through cocoa cultivation.

Chapter 4 goes on to explore the significance of certain temporal boundaries related to cocoa farming in my fieldwork area of rural southwestern Ghana. With an initial focus on the frontier town of Bonsu Nkwanta I analyse the ways in which individuals' desires towards experiences of future success through obtainment of material wealth mix with religious and spiritual beliefs, economic and

ludic activities, and all set against the cyclical conditions of cocoa farming. I present the argument that in the rural Ghanaian setting where gradual, linear accumulation of wealth through smallholder cocoa farming most often fails, churches, banks, spiritualists, and lotto schemes in turn become vested with the hope and faith of many local population members.

Chapter 5 expands the temporal theme introduced in the previous chapter by shifting the focus to acts of individual agency in the form of cheating, corruption, and other illicit ways of making, breaking, and exploiting the many boundaries of the Ghanaian cocoa business for the purposes of experiencing personal success through the obtainment of material wealth. I argue that deliberate preservation of indeterminacy serves as an effective way to create and exploit spaces for secret profit margins, which I consider hidden instantiations of spatialized value.

In the conclusion of the thesis I sum up the findings of the preceding chapters with a final short ethnographic case framing a topically arranged deliberation on the combined ways in which the multiple practices of people in the cocoa business of Ghana imbue the cocoa of this place with characteristics of spatiality, value, and future potentials, in effect shaping the cocoa as a complexly constituted natural good. The concluding argument of the thesis is therefore that cocoa can be gainfully understood as innumerable connections that are constantly made and remade in countless ways.



Image 2: Ripe cocoa pods on a tree in a cocoa plantation in Western Region Ghana, 2014.

CHAPTER 1:

COCOA IN A MARGINAL BORDER COMMUNITY

The village of Topman lies in the far periphery of the Ghanaian state. The tiny village borders the boundary line towards Côte d'Ivoire in a place secluded from any major thoroughfares and it is surrounded by verdant cocoa plantations in all directions. The village is not depicted on any map that I have been able to find, and instead it was purely by coincidence that I one day found my way there.

During my 2014-15 fieldworks I spent some time around a number of communities close to the Ghanaian-Ivoirian border areas in parts of the Western Region of Ghana in the hopes of learning more about the importance of this international boundary line for cocoa in relation to farming practices, commercial activities, and government administration. As my travels brought me closer to the national border zone the presence of the Ghanaian customs and immigration authorities also became more evident. Uniformed soldiers had already carefully perused my passport and permit papers at a checkpoint some 8kms inland before they had allowed me passage along the country roads leading towards the actual border zone.

Cocoa has been Ghana's primary export commodity for close to a century with a total output in 2013 of an estimated 850.000 tonnes, only surpassed in volume by Côte d'Ivoire, the country's neighbour to the West, which in the same period exported some 1.480.000 tonnes. Together, these two countries produced about 71% of the world's total harvest of cocoa beans (ICCO 2013). In Ghana the majority of the cocoa producers are small-scale farmers, numbering in total around 720.000 people, which when including family dependants are estimated to make up around 25-30% of the nation's total population of around 20 million inhabitants (Anthonio & Aikins 2009). Given all these numbers it seemed remarkable to me how limited the availability of chocolate products was in contemporary Ghana, especially outside the largest cities. Additionally, among the population of the rural cocoa growing areas of Ghana's Western Region – the primary area of most of my fieldwork – chocolate tends to be perceived as a costly luxury good. To my mind it seems rather remarkable that a sizeable number of farmers experience that manufactured chocolate products are both too difficult to find and too expensive to buy, considering the fact that they themselves are growing cocoa beans on as much as 97-98% of their own available farmlands, as farm size surveys have revealed (Knudsen & Fold 2011: 383). Since cocoa in Ghana thus appears to be less associated with impressions of taste in the

form of chocolate products than among consumers elsewhere around the globe, I wonder how cocoa might instead feature in the lives of those people who shape their livelihoods around the cultivation, regulation, and transport of it. What different kinds of meaning and value do such people associate with this good, and to which degree does it make sense to treat cocoa as one objectively definable raw material – and not multiple?

My first encounter with the village of Topman happened entirely by coincidence. One day during fieldwork my assistant and I had turned our rented car down a small unmarked dirt road in the search for a Ghanaian border post called ‘Oscar’, based on a tip provided us by another border official¹⁰ earlier in the day. We had not yet heard of Topman, but we succeeded in finding the ‘Oscar’ front post without much trouble. Three small square huts made of aerated concrete bricks covered with corrugated tin roofs appeared after a turn of the road, all surrounded by cocoa trees belonging to nearby small farms. Between the last two huts a rope hung limply across the road with knots of small torn strips of red-white barricade tape tied to it here and there as a sort of improvised indication of the border crossing. The dusty wheel track wound itself out of sight in between the cocoa trees on the other side. At the guard post the arrival of our car was met by the stern looks of two Ghanaian soldiers who stepped out onto the road dressed in green and brown baggy camouflage pants, black polished military boots and white undershirts. Their lack of uniform coats did not seem particularly out of place on this day where the weather was very hot and humid. The initial intimidating gestures from the immigration officers soon relaxed into smiles once they had inspected my identification papers and learned that I had come here in the hope of talking with them and not to try and travel into Côte d’Ivoire through this border crossing that was officially closed for traffic. A conversation with a European traveller did not occur frequently here, and the officials received my visit as an amusing break from an otherwise largely monotonous working day. As they soon told me, except for four pedestrian travellers from Togo with dubious paper works, nothing much had happened here today, other than the usual trickle of local farmers.

I spoke for a while with the officials about their lives and the functions of their jobs, but it was not until well into the conversation that I became aware that this particular place technically was

¹⁰ The border officials that I refer to here and over the course of the present chapter are members of the GIS (Ghana Immigration Service) unit headquartered at the Dadieso border crossing and whose members in shifts are deployed to various border posts and road checkpoints northwards from Dadieso to Africa (the latter community still erroneously listed as ‘Tanzania’ on Google Maps as of 05.08.2018) and northeast-bound to the town of Jato. These GIS officials are therefore part of a different command chain than the ones discussed in relation to the town of Akaatiso in the introduction chapter of this thesis.

not the border itself. The district's border authorities had instead moved the border post back to this spot closer to the main road for the sake of convenience, since the dirt road up ahead was in a very decrepit state and the access to telecommunications signals, clean water, and other supplies out there were all problematic. In fact, as the GIS officers told me, there was a small Ghanaian village called Topman some two kilometres up ahead, right before the real border. At the conclusion of our talk the officers granted permission for my assistant and I to pass the rope barrier and make a visit to this village, on the condition that we both promised to return back the same day and not continue to Côte d'Ivoire, since such a course of action might lead to trouble for the posted officers, if their superiors were to find out.

The road onward was indeed in a bad condition and was in several places almost washed away by the region's frequent tropical rains. A dirt bike or a 4WD vehicle would clearly have been preferable here instead of our small passenger car that now struggled forward in zigzags between potholes and rainwater channels in the already rough wheel tracks. The landscape around us consisted of densely planted cocoa trees behind meter tall grasses along the roadsides which here and there gave way for glimpses to earthen coloured clay farm huts secluded in the otherwise verdantly green landscape of cocoa trees. While we slowly advanced alternating between first and second gear my assistant remarked how the signal strength of our cell phones rapidly decreased. From two indicator points back at the Oscar station to now one and soon after 'no-signal' signs on both screens. Evidently, wherever we were headed lay outside the coverage of both MTN and Vodafone, at the time the two largest telecommunications companies in Ghana.

After the last ascend of a forested hilltop we finally arrived at the Topman village where people with loud yells stepped out of their huts and expressed their puzzlement and surprise to suddenly see strangers among them. I soon after found myself placed in a plastic garden chair under the shade of a tree in the middle of the village with a group of people gathering around me. Meanwhile some of the many children brought out long wooden benches from the huts so that the other adults could sit down as well. At first I saw only women and children around me, but soon after several men also showed up, most of them sweaty and in dirty work clothes with machetes in their hands, directly back from work out in the surrounding plantations.

I was right away presented with a welcome offering of a plastic cup filled with slightly murky water, and after a few polite mouthfuls and a presentation of myself, I gained the opportunity to ask a few questions to the people present. I learned that the village of Topman was founded in 1973-74 by a Ghanaian man named Yekpo Woyome who purchased some tracts of the area's virgin forests

from the chief of Boinzan, a traditional Sefwi village chieftancy based some 25km from there. The Sefwi tribe, a subgroup of the Akan tribal lineage, were considered to be the indigenous population of the region and had primarily formed their livelihoods through hunting and extensive agriculture before pioneer settlers from other parts of Ghana brought cocoa here during the latter half of the 20th century¹¹. Mr. Woyome chose to give his newly founded settlement the name of ‘Top-man-krom’ (*krom* in Twi and Sefwi means ‘hamlet’) in order to reflect his own ambitions for his future career as cocoa farmer, and the place soon became referred to in daily speak as ‘Topman’. More immigrants joined him as neighbours over the coming years and contributed to the building of the village and the replanting of the area’s dense tropical forests into the many small household based cocoa plantations that characterise the region today.

The conversation with the residents of Topman offered a wealth of information about the forty-odd year history of the village, about techniques for cocoa farming, and the life conditions for smallholder families here at this place. I jotted down notes as quickly as I could in my notebook, all the while I attempted to gain a better impression of the surroundings. Cocoa was without doubt the focal point for much activity around here. From the seat under the shade of the trees I could look out toward the open sunbathed square in the middle of the village. The square was surrounded by semi-detached clay huts; some with tin roofs, some with straw; some with painted walls, but all with facades that opened up towards the central point. The centre of the square was taken up by several pole mounted wooden drying platforms raised above the ground, the style of which was identical to many other places around the region. On such platforms mats made of bound bamboo strips could be unfurled so that fermented cocoa beans could be spread atop them to dry in the sunlight for typically 5-6 days until they were ready to be sold. Even though cocoa could be grown all year round it was at this point outside the main crop season, so on this day only a single drying platform was in use. A brownish layer of cocoa beans was visible on top of it, and in the afternoon heat a thick sour-sweet odour of cocoa spread all the way over to the place where we sat. Cocoa was ever present in Topman, and just like the permeating smells of it, I soon realised that the raw material in this borderland was not easily reigned in. Instead, cocoa took on the appearance of both a defined resource and an ephemeral connection.

¹¹ More on this topic in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Cocoa Production in Ghana and Elsewhere

From the distanced overview offered by world maps it is easy to spot a climatic boundary-making factor for cocoa cultivation, since the cocoa tree – in the Linnean system classified as *Theobroma cacao* – is a tropical plant that requires warm, shady surroundings characterised by frequent rainfall, high humidity, and temperatures ranging between 20° and 32° Celsius, and as such it does not thrive outside of a relatively small belt around the Equator (Mossu 1992). Although the cocoa tree is indigenous to the Amazon its seeds were spread to the Equatorial parts of Africa and Southeast Asia through the seafaring connections of the colonial times (Wood & Lass 1989 [1955]; Clarence-Smith & Ruf 1996). The tropical forest areas of southern Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire had over time proven highly suitable for commercial planting of the cocoa tree, and from the closing decades of the 19th century the British and the French colonial powers had both encouraged the cultivation and export of cocoa from their tropical West African territories to supply the growing market demands for chocolate products primarily in Europe and North America (Chaveau & Léonard 1996). In Ghana the commercial cocoa cultivation took its start at the Akwapim area some 20km inland of the capital of Accra (Hill 1997 [1963]; Dickson 1969), and from there over the course of the 20th century the planting of cocoa gradually spread across the rest of the country's southern tropical forest areas, spurred on by steadily increasing international demands for cocoa, high population growth levels, as well as low establishing costs for cocoa farming (Austin 2005; Woods 2004; Crook 2001).

The story of the founding of the village of Topman serves as a fairly typical example from the final phase of the long period of cocoa farm establishments, which from the late 1960s and early 1970s also reached the remotest corners of the Western Region of Ghana – a part of the nation which had hitherto remained a relatively sparsely populated tropical forest. Some researchers have characterised this region as the 'final cocoa frontier' of Ghana (Knudsen & Fold 2011) based on the fact that this area was the last where undeveloped land remained available for prospective cocoa farmers. Many of the earliest immigrants managed to obtain cheap or even free plots of land through petitions placed with chiefs of the Sefwi tribal communities (Boni 2005; Awanyo 1998; England 1993). Such chiefs acted – and still act – as traditional custodians of tribal lands and have ruled over the distribution of access to lands that were considered to belong to a particular tribal authority, called a 'stool' (Awanyo 1998). In this regard the judicial heritage of Ghana differs from that of Côte d'Ivoire, since the British colonial authorities of the once-named 'Gold Coast Colony' – the current Ghana – initially opted for a more indirect form of rule where the traditional chieftancies were secured a number

of privileges and rights through the colonial legal system. Among these were the rights of chiefs to mediate and decide verdicts over local conflicts through so-called ‘Native Courts’ along with the right to administrate collective rights over tribal lands (Crook 2001). A largely opposite development from this took place in Côte d’Ivoire where the French colonial administration established a centralised legal system and nationalised the rights to land (Amanor 2007: 211-12), with the subsequently applied ‘laissez-faire’ principle that land in effect belonged to those who put it to use¹². In both countries these principles were upheld after the attainment of independence from the colonial powers, something which for Ghana took place in 1957 and for Côte d’Ivoire in 1960.

Back in the shade under the tree in Topman in 2014 some of the village elders told me about the time they initially came here as young people seeking a future as cocoa farmers. They had all travelled here from other parts of Ghana, and each of them had been granted their plot of land by the Boinzan chief, under whose power this area was traditionally considered to lie. In principle all land grants such as these were only to be considered as temporary leases for typically 99 years or so, since all lands here according to tradition belong inalienably to the Sefwi tribe and therefore sooner or later ought to return again to tribal control. However, this aspect worried neither the population of Topman nor any other of the region’s farmers that I spoke with, since the 99 year leases undoubtedly surpassed the lifetimes of the initial farmers as well as possibly those of their children, and additionally there was a widespread expectation that all such leases, if necessary, could become renewed by the farmers’ grandchildren or great grandchildren.

From the time of its foundation in 1973 and up until today cocoa had formed the pivoting point for life in Topman. Even though the small vegetable gardens around the village also saw the cultivation of food crops such as cassava, plaintain, and rice, the people of Topman emphasized how cocoa constituted by far the most important crop around there as it served as their sole source of income. The community members I spoke with estimated that the population here in total produced around 2.000 bags of cocoa every year, each containing the official Ghanaian standard weight of 64kg. These bags were sold to the three local cocoa ‘purchasing clerks’ operating there. These people in turn arranged to bring the cocoa bags further inland in Ghana via motorbikes to larger rural depots, with which they each were affiliated. In this particular regard the life conditions in the village had improved somewhat over the most recent decade or so, I was told, since before then people had to walk with

¹² In 1963 the Ivoirian President Houphouët-Boigny publicly reaffirmed this principle with the statement that: “La terre appartient à celui qui la met en valeur” [The land belongs to those who develop it] (Chaveau 2000: 105).

each bag on their head first out to the main road some 5 km away and there wait for transport opportunity with a trotro [locally operated minibus transport service] or a passing truck onwards to Bonsu Nkwanta, which was the nearest larger frontier town some 10 km away. Only once there would the farmers be able to sell their cocoa produce to purchasers at the depots.

The arrival in Topman of licenced purchasing clerks (LPCs) working on behalf of the so-called Licenced Buying Companies (LBCs) came about as a result of changes that had taken place in the Ghanaian cocoa business since 1992. At that time COCOBOD, the Ghanaian government institution that until then had held a monopoly over the country's cocoa sector, opened up for a partial liberalisation of the business following pressure from the World Bank and IMF (Fold 2004; Kolavalli & Vigneri 2011). Although the Ghanaian government still to this day handles all official quality controls and maintains its monopoly on cocoa exports via the CMC (The Cocoa Marketing Company) it has since the late 1990s now been possible for private purchasing companies to obtain licences to operate in the cocoa producing districts. With the partial liberalization of the cocoa market this has resulted in the establishment of currently about 37 LBCs, while the government's formerly monopolistic purchasing company, the PBC (The Produce Buying Company) in turn has become restructured into an independent company with only partial state-ownership, and which has had its total market share reduced to currently about 40%, all according to business insiders I spoke with. COCOBOD still dictates the official farm-gate purchasing price for all cocoa in Ghana, which differs from the system in Côte d'Ivoire where a more complete liberalisation of the cocoa market has meant that prices here since 1999 have been continuously negotiated between purchasers and farmers (Gilbert & Varangis 2003). Additionally, the maintenance of the Ghanaian governmental quality control system means that Ghanaian cocoa has earned a reputation for being of a finer and more uniform quality than for example Ivoirian cocoa with the result that Ghanaian cocoa is sold at premium prices on the world market (Kolavalli & Vigneri 2011).

In Topman as well as in other communities around the region I repeatedly heard similar explanations when I asked about the differences in cocoa production between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Apart from mentioning the different pricing systems as well as the presence of the governmental Ghanaian quality control, several cocoa farmers throughout the area told me that Ivoirian farmers were not as patient as Ghanaian farmers when handling cocoa beans. Ivoirian farmers did reputedly not care to spend time to manually remove excess plant fibres and other materials from the fermented cocoa beans, and neither did they want to wait the necessary five to six days for the cocoa to dry in the sun before bagging it for sale. Instead some Ivoirians lit fires under their drying tables with

the consequence that their cocoa became roasted rather than dried and gained a bad smoked taste. Other stories had it that Ivoirian farmers rushed to sell their cocoa before it was sufficiently dry, and so the beans would become mouldy before they could even reach the ports and be shipped out. For of all such kinds of reasons, as I was assured, Ghanaian cocoa is of a better quality than Ivoirian. The way in which these farmers cultivate and treat their cocoa has thus become associated with both notions of national identity and norms for how one ought to perform the work as a proper Ghanaian cocoa farmer.

The three cocoa purchasing clerks in Topman were all locally residing farmers who had chosen to take on part time jobs for the companies PBC, Armajaro, and Akuafo Adamfo, of which the latter two were private actors on the market in contrast to the still partially state-owned PBC. The purchasers were all paid on commission and each of them managed their own little padlocked 'buying shed' where they could receive, weigh, and store the bags of cocoa that Topman's farmers offered them. The same system was in place at practically every other village around the region, and in the same way as during my previous talks with other cocoa farmers I was told in Topman that cocoa here was exclusively a cash crop: people cultivated and sold the raw product but did not consume it themselves. From what I was able to gather this meant that cocoa was not utilised as an ingredient in any local dishes, nor did it appear to be part of any local myths or traditions. The local forms of cocoa application were typically limited to either usage of cocoa butter for skin pomade, or in some cases the discarded husks of the harvested cocoa pods were burned and the ashes mixed with shea nut or palm tree oils, rolled into small greyish balls and used locally as a rudimentary kind of soap. Finally, the local population would sometimes during the harvesting work put fresh cocoa beans into their mouths and suck on the thin layer of slightly sweet pulp around it, while the bitter raw bean itself would be spat out again. Other than this specific instance, cocoa in this place was not considered as foodstuff. Chocolate was a product known to most, but such products were considered to be expensive luxury goods that were only very occasionally affordable – if even available – during visits to market days in nearby larger rural towns such as Bonsu Nkwanta or further away. The ways in which the raw cocoa beans would later on become transformed into processed chocolate was explained to me as both unknown and uninteresting according to everyone I talked with.

In the Borderlands of the Authorities: Topman and Blank Spots on the Map

Mr. Woyome, the initial founder of Topman village, had already died in 1978, I was told, but it seemed likely that he would not have experienced many further structural developments around the place, even if he had gone on to live there for forty years instead of only four. The group of community members talked loudly on top of each other while relating to me how they felt that they had become forgotten by the Ghanaian authorities. They still did not have any borehole at the village and had to fetch water from a nearby pond and carry it back in buckets. They also still did not have access to electricity nor any health clinic or school in the village, and the dirt road leading there they had had to construct entirely on their own. The children of the village walked along this road to and from the primary school in a neighbouring village out by the main road some 5km away. No NGO had yet found its way to this place, and the people living here implored me to try and somehow bring aid to the village.

The meeting with the villagers of Topman left me rather astounded. How come this place in 2014 still had such a poor infrastructure and remained unconnected to grids of electricity, water, telecommunications, and development initiatives? Where were the fruits of the forty years of cocoa cultivation and sales to be found? At the time of my visit the official purchasing price of cocoa was 212 GH¢ per standard bag, an amount which at the time corresponded to about 75 USD, but in the village I was told that such amounts of money did not reach far, once the costs for the children's schooling, staple foodstuffs and clothing, as well as necessary purchases of agro-chemicals for farming were covered.

A few days later I asked for more information about Topman village at the District Assembly office in the town of Juaboso. The employees there reported that the district administration regrettably was not in possession of any information beyond the listing of which electoral district the village belonged to, as well as the recorded population number of the place, which most recently in 2008 was registered as 202 people. The village furthermore did not feature on any of the district authorities' maps over the area, since only communities with currently existing public institutions had been indicated on those. I asked somewhat surprised whether I could be referred to another public authority for more information about Topman, but the officials replied in the negative that this particular District Assembly office was supposed to be in possession of the most detailed local data existing anywhere among Ghana's authorities. The confidence of their answer seemed unperturbed by

the fact that I was enquiring about a community not even indicated on the wall map hanging in the anteroom of the District Planning Office.

The poor availability of public records regarding the Topman village soon after brought my conversation with two of the District Assembly employees over to the topic of the authorities' work in general. I learned that the district authorities here in praxis had very little influence on the cocoa sector. The national government had instated a legal prohibition against the establishment of local taxes and fees on goods or activities related to cocoa production, which left the authorities here completely dependent on the disbursement of government funds from the capital. There had lately, however, been some problems with these payments, so the district authorities of Juaboso were in March 2014 still awaiting the receipt of the budgeted operating funds for the third and the fourth quartiles of the previous year, in addition to those of the first quartile of this year. For this reason numerous public work tasks and initiatives were currently placed on hold, and the thought of expanding the offer of public services to yet another village in the district therefore seemed entirely unrealistic at the time.

During my visit to the District Assembly the somewhat stagnant, dusty atmosphere of the place was contrasted by the loud noise of traffic coming from the roads outside. Heavily loaded trucks were steadily driving south towards the coast with cargoes of cocoa, while more lightly burdened trucks returned to the area with fresh pallets of empty jute sacks pre-stamped with texts saying: "Ghana Cocoa Board – Produce of Ghana". At the same time government employed Quality Control Officers (QCOs) were busily driving back and forth in jeeps and on motorbikes answering calls to make inspections of each bag of cocoa that steadily arrived from the nearby villages to the numerous LBC depots in town. While the district administration's connection to the rest of the country at this time appeared partially severed, the connections made through cocoa production, on the other hand, looked to be thriving.

I left the District Assembly office somewhat perturbed after having learned how villages like Topman could remain almost invisible in the public administrative system and how this system in turn appeared largely disconnected from the society it was meant to govern. I recalled how I a few days before had visited a public primary school in a nearby village where every single student during the morning assembly had raised their hands in reply to my question of who among them had parents that cultivated cocoa. After the assembly session had ended the headmaster of the school had stepped over to me and confided that actually both he and the school's other four teachers had their own private cocoa farms too that they tended to outside of work hours. The contrast between this event and the visit at the District Assembly now struck me as quite vivid, since unlike my prior expectations it seemed

that cocoa among the public administrative authorities was far more absent than in any other place, public or private, which I had visited in the region.

Despite the discouraging words from the district administration I still hoped that I could find more connections to Topman at some of the other government authorities of the region, among these in particular those specialised in cocoa. At first I had no luck with this search at the governmental QCC (Quality Control Company), since this authority only became involved once the purchasers had brought the cocoa to the depots in the larger communities around the region. However, later on I gained an insight during a visit to the district office of CHED (Cocoa Health & Extension Division) in Juaboso. This subdivision of the Ghanaian cocoa authorities was specialised in the fight against plant diseases and pests with an aim towards general improvements in the quality and outputs of the cocoa tree stocks of the country. From the district office in Juaboso the employees went out to local farms and communities where they diagnosed the healthiness of the cocoa trees growing there and recommended various treatments when necessary. Additionally these employees taught short courses to educate local traditional authorities and prominent farmers in ways in which to improve the yields of their cocoa plantations, with the assumption that these community leaders in turn would teach other local farmers by way of example.

Inside the CHED office the division's cartographer excitedly showed me how he was in the process of digitising the data of the institution. Ever since his employment had commenced about two years ago he had steadily worked on the creation of various digital map files with information about the cocoa farms of the district, all based on information brought back to him by his colleagues from their measurements and tests in the field. The cartographer opened up one such map file in the Auto-CAD computer programme, activated some filters, and then pointed out to me how he indicated the healthy plantation plots around Juaboso with a green colour, whereas farms with infected trees were indicated with red. As he explained, this colour coding made it easy to keep an overview of the ongoing needs for farm health interventions around the district.

I asked the cartographer if he could also show me the status of the area around the village of Topman. This name was not at first familiar to him, so I had to describe the general area around the village in more detail before he figured out which place I was referring to. The cartographer then zoomed out his map a bit and scrolled a couple of screen widths to the left, until the westernmost part of the district came into view. No colours or detailed lines were visible here, and the area appeared like an empty black sector intersected by a jagged vertical white line indicating the national border towards Côte d'Ivoire to the west.

After a brief moment of silence the cartographer went on to explain how a bureaucratic obstacle unfortunately still hampered the work of his department in this particular area to the west of Juaboso. The issue was that this locality still featured under the name of 'Bia Tawya Forest Reserve' under the authority of Ghana's Forestry Commission, although the entire area in fact had been settled and cultivated by cocoa farmers since the 1970s and early 80s. The petition for a reclassification had been put in motion with the national authorities in Accra, he added, but the official paperwork had unfortunately still not yet caught up with the realities. Here at the CHED office they were hoping that all necessary permissions would get in order within a few years, since it was not conducive for the department's tasks toward improving the health of the cocoa sector when they still did not have a mandate to operate in all parts of the district where the cocoa was actually grown and where plant diseases and pests likewise appeared and would spread from.

The blank sector on the map remained on my mind for some time after I took my leave from the personnel at the CHED office. Again it seemed that Topman and its population had slid outside the purview of the authorities, and this time into an unregulated frontier zone in the borderlands between human cultivated lands and reserved wild nature. Anthropologist Anna Tsing has described a frontier as the following: "A frontier is an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet – not yet mapped, not yet regulated. It is a zone of unmapping: even in its planning a frontier is imagined as unplanned." (Tsing 2005: 28). Tsing's description appeared in the context of timber logging in the Kalimantan region of Indonesia where the unruliness of the place would likely appear equally present to a pioneering lumberjack as to a government representative as to a visiting anthropologist. However, when I tried to think of Topman through this 'frontier'-definition, it rather appeared to me instead that it made little sense to speak of this place as a frontier in any absolute sense. From the perspective of the offices of the district capital Topman appeared far more like an unregulated, unplanned frontier zone than what I had experienced it as inside the village itself. For the population of Topman the 'frontier' had now long since become a place of home, and with this view came also the desire to become connected with the rest of Ghana. All wild growing forest had long since been parcelled out and turned into plantations. The Cocoa pioneers themselves had grown old and their children and grandchildren born in the village had gradually taken over the work on their parents' and grandparents' plots. Even the cocoa trees were here well into the second or third generation, since the old trees had gradually been cut down and replaced with new seedlings. What would it take for this place to no longer be a frontier – either for the national authorities residing afar or for the population residing within? Could the prayers of the local community for the arrival of an NGO or for the attention of the government authorities be interpreted as expressions of a desire to become included in the rest of the nation? With

reference to Tsing's 'frontier' definition it appeared to me that Topman had somehow become locked into a situation where decades of inactivity from the government side had found recurrent legitimacy through the area's persistent status of 'frontier', as a 'planned unplanned zone' – and thus perpetually outside the scope any official development agenda.

The perception of these remote corners of the Western Region in general as Ghana's 'last cocoa frontier' seemed quite persistent among Ghanaians I spoke with across the country and a number of factors hampered a transition of the perception from 'frontier' to regulated civilization. One historically grounded factor was the continued local rule which the British colonial powers had admitted the traditional authorities throughout the country while these colonisers at the same time decided the overall administrative lines of the colony from the offices of the regional and national headquarters. Thereby the foundation was made for the situation where the traditional chief of Boinzan in the early 1970s could distribute the area around Topman to immigrant cocoa pioneers, while at the same time the area remained classified as a 'Forest Reserve' in the files of the government offices hundreds of kilometres away in Accra. This phenomenon has been evidenced in multiple cases across the African continent over the 20th century, leading to what conservationist William Adams called "classic 'paper parks', there in the official government list, but invisible on the ground." (Adams 2004: 8). In post-colonial Ghana this form of classificatory discrepancy had been exacerbated by the conditions in the governmental system that for decades had suffered from administrative irregularities and delays caused by political turmoil and mismanagement, including persistent problems with the distribution of the government funds.

Cocoa in the Borderlands of Categories: Movements and Liquid Resources

Back in Topman I went for a walk along with some villagers down to see the actual border crossing to the neighbouring country. From the backside of the village a winding footpath led through a lightly sloping landscape consisting of cocoa plantations and scattered farm huts down to a little stream in a dale some 900m away. An unassuming little wooden bridge some 1,5m wide and 8-10m long spanned across the shallow water and connected the two countries. Here there were no crossbeams, signs, or buildings in sight, and if not for the words of my hosts I would have been unlikely to have guessed that this place in fact constituted an international border crossing. I gazed

toward the other side of the narrow bridge, but the footpath beyond soon disappeared into the green foliage without any immediate signs of human habitation.



Image 3: View towards Côte d'Ivoire from the wooden foot bridge near the village of Topman in southwestern Ghana, March 2014.

The Topman villagers told me that the border officials typically came down here to the bridge and camped for periods of time during the main season for cocoa harvests in the months of October to January. The rest of the year, however, they stayed back at the Oscar post and only made occasional motorbike patrols to the place. The same sort of praxis took place on the Ivoirian side where there were no nearby human settlements either. To the Ghanaian customs- and immigrations authorities in this part of the country the control over the movement of people and cocoa were their two primary areas of responsibility. Movement of cocoa across the borders was totally prohibited, but differences in prices between the countries made it tempting for some people to try and smuggle this good across anyway. The flows of cocoa would thus change in accordance with the ebbs and flows of the relative strengths of the two economies, international demands for cocoa, and with the political situations in the two neighbouring countries. Some years the cocoa price had been higher in Ghana than in Côte d'Ivoire, but during the latter years the situation had been the opposite. Some of the residents of Topman told me how a 64kg bag of cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire at the moment could be sold for a price equal to 260 GHC while at the same time the official purchasing price in Ghana only stood

at 212 GH¢. When I asked whether this price difference meant that Ghanaians would smuggle their cocoa across the border, my hosts smiled uneasily and shared a few looks with each other before one of them shrugged and replied diplomatically that any society would of course have a few people breaking the rules while the majority abided the law. The punishment for smuggling was very severe too, the Topman villager added, so if the border officials arrested you, you would be in big trouble. I asked what this punishment actually entailed but did not learn much more about it, since it had apparently not yet happened that anyone from around Topman had been arrested. If you were caught red handed the border officials would in theory hand you over to the district police, who would then bring you before a court of justice, but this whole process was described to me in uncertain and general terms. In practice, my Ghanaian assistant later explained to me, rare situations such as these would typically be solved locally to spare the trouble for everyone involved. In return for the donation of a negotiable sum of money to the border officials an unlucky smuggler would be let off with a spoken warning, and the authorities in turn would avoid the hassle of having to spend time and resources on paperwork.

During our walk along the pathway back to Topman a young man on a motorbike drove quickly past us coming from the direction of the border crossing. One of the villagers pointed at the passing motorbike and remarked casually that – speaking of cocoa smuggling – nowadays it was most often Ivoirian purchasers who travelled across the border and offered to buy the cocoa directly from the individual farmers. Cocoa smuggling seemed to be a well-known praxis here in this area, although the phenomenon took place as series of covert connections between the countries.

The question of the smuggling was evidently also a very sensitive topic to the Ghanaian border officials and not something that they found it easy to talk about with a visiting foreigner. The light mood that had been present during my initial talks with the border personnel back at the Oscar post instantly hardened into distrustful looks and carefully weighed answers the very moment I – on the return trip from Topman – asked them about the topic of cocoa and smuggling. A sudden string of sceptical counter questions from the GIS officers now raised doubts about my former presentation of myself and my claims to be visiting with a purely academic purpose; could I really be a researcher from Copenhagen University, or was this merely a cover story hiding my true identity as an undercover journalist? The officials repeatedly mentioned the word ‘Anas’ in their line of critical questions to me, and I later on learned that many people among the Ghanaian border protection authorities still felt the consequences of a corruption scandal that had hit the institution in 2010. At this time a Ghanaian undercover journalist with the pen name Anas Aremeyaw Anas had caused a public uproar in the Ghanaian media by broadcasting a number of secretly filmed videos showing border officials receiving

monetary bribes in return for letting cocoa past their border posts. The scandal drew a lot of public attention and resulted in a high profile court case and several people losing their jobs even among highly placed border officials (The Daily Graphic 2014). The topic remained delicate to the border authorities to this day, because on the one hand it was their official duty to prevent any kind of transport of cocoa beans across the border, while on the other hand they experienced an ongoing pressure from members of the local population, who would offer them enticing shares of the profit if they would merely look the other way when, for example, a motorcycle loaded with a bag of cocoa passed by. By being stationed at a remote border post in a poorly salaried job position and in a country where corruption was widespread, it was seemingly easy to become tempted. The categorical rules and regulations from the distant capital city could easily lose their logical appearance here in this place where the outlook and the everyday life were different, contributing instead to the common image of African borders as sites of repeated negotiations between travellers and officials based on socio-economic factors, along with factors of gender, age, class, ethnicity, and nationality (Mechlinski 2010: 103).

To where does the cocoa of Topman flow? Does the farmer choose to sell his cocoa to the Ghanaian purchasers, as the law prescribes, or does he follow the temptation of the higher prices offered by the Ivoirian purchasers from across the border? Does the Ghanaian farmer's cocoa gain the stamp of a quality product or a discount product, regardless of the fact that the material characteristics of the cocoa remain the same? The fieldwork in the cocoa plantations of this borderland region has reminded me of the Italian author Claudio Magris' (1989) story of a mythical, unique place high up in the Alps where the two slanted roof sides of a little alpine cabin send the rainwater toward the wellspring of the Rhine on the one side and the wellspring of the Danube on the other. An otherwise insignificant gust of wind in this place can thus easily be capable of pushing a drop of rain from the direction of one river system and into the other. It is likely with good reason that this place is described in purely mythical terms, since it hardly makes practical sense to pursue the clarity of the map or the category into such a detail that single raindrops on an alpine rooftop will become labelled as either foundational components of the Rhine or the Danube. Likewise, from the point of view when standing in the village of Topman it was easy to pause and wonder about the world market's distinctions between Ivoirian and Ghanaian cocoa and what the big difference between them is supposed to be anyway.

Unbounded Cocoa

The Topman case indicates to me that the closer one studies the boundary lines of these borderlands, the blurrier they tend to get. According to the political maps the border between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire officially runs through the thalweg of the little stream west of Topman, but in practical terms the border is most of the year only enforced back at the Oscar border post some three kilometres away – a situation that places the village in an ambiguous position in relation to the Ghanaian law. Topman is also caught in a dubious zone as far as the Ghanaian administrative system is concerned, since the community is concurrently situated within the bounds of an old – although today only fictive – forest reserve, and from this point of view cannot exist, while it is nevertheless also registered by name and population numbers at the district authorities, and thus its inhabitants can place their votes at political elections with the same legality as the rest of the country's population. On top of these factors Topman exists in an unclear position in relation to the Ghanaian cocoa authorities who on the one hand have steadily purchased all the cocoa offered to them by farmers of the village over the past forty years, while on the other hand these same authorities still do not have the mandate to assist the same farmers with education and subsidized agro-chemicals, since Topman geographically resides under the authority of another government institution.

Although Topman administratively speaking is situated in an ambiguous zone partially outside the reach of the Ghanaian state, the village clearly does not exist in a vacuum. The cocoa appears in this regard not only to constitute the reason for the initial establishment of the village and its continued means of survival, but cocoa additionally stands as the place's strongest ongoing – although composite – connection to the surrounding world. For the population of Topman cocoa constitutes their primary livelihood and the best available means for them to make an economic income, and for this reason the traffic of motorbikes loaded with cocoa bags represents the busiest – if not almost the only – type of vehicle traffic on the rough dirt track from the village back into Ghana. Both the Ghanaian state licenced cocoa purchasers as well as the Ivoirian smugglers bring money to the village, which in turn enables the villagers to pay for their children's schooling, in addition to the purchase of foodstuffs, clothes, agro-chemicals, and various consumable goods during visits to market days in the nearby larger towns. Cocoa is here a tool for the population of Topman to reproduce their connections to the outside world.

Other connections are more complicated, not least when the occasionally present border officials dutifully insist that cocoa beans harvested from trees around Topman ought to not be moved the few hundred metres westward to Côte d'Ivoire, since Ghanaian cocoa should not become Ivoirian, regardless of the fact that it is not obviously possible to tell the difference between the beans, if this were to happen anyway. The lower Ghanaian cocoa purchasing prices combined with the border officials' looming threats of punishment for smuggling and – unofficially – apparently widespread willingness to look the other way in return for monetary gifts, all contributes to an ambivalent perception of the state among the population of Topman. The community members identified themselves to me in general as Ghanaians, but despite forty years of presence here the mutual recognition of them by the Ghanaian state in the form of public services and infrastructure has still not arrived. Instead, the state power becomes primarily expressed in a more negative form through the presence of the armed border protection personnel and the steady pressure put on the farmers to sell their produce at the lower Ghanaian price, unless they are willing to offer the payment of bribes to the border officials or risk facing the legal punishment for clandestine engagements with smuggling.

The borderlands around Topman therefore appear as a 'frontier' from the point of view of the Ghanaian state, which in some ways keeps the local population locked inside a marginal position. This margin, however, also constitutes a space of potential, a flexibility to take advantage of the differences between the cocoa markets of the two countries to generate a personal profit – and from one's position on the periphery of the power of the authorities also to get away with it. A complex interplay happens here where cocoa contributes both to the enforcement and the transgression of national boundaries, while concurrently the boundary-making efforts shape certain national types of cocoa, and all the while the actual cocoa moves silently and steadily from one category to another, almost as if it was wind-blown raindrops over a mythical alpine rooftop.

From the point of view of these borderlands between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire it may be possible to recognise cocoa as a certain type of natural good bearing a particular Latin name, but the value associated with the cocoa appears as completely entangled in a multitude of other aspects of life around Topman, and remarkably the cocoa here in this place appears as almost anything other than the raw foodstuff that it is primarily known as in many other places in the world. This is just one of the complex conditions that people live with in these borderlands where both cocoa and the geographical boundary at the same time appear as defined with categorical sharpness, but also as differently blurred and porous in the daily practices – the latter aspect further recognized as a notorious characteristic of African borders in general (Coplan 2010:1). At the village of Topman, where I was immediately told

that the border is not the border, people practice this paradox through easy and difficult, evident and hidden connections. Cocoa contributes to the establishment of physical and conceptual boundaries, just as cocoa contributes to the transgressions and connecting activities across those very same boundaries. Therefore, I suggest that although cocoa can be perceived as a firmly defined product of nature, it can also equally be approached as dynamically combined meaning-making relations.

Crucially, in this place where the imposed boundary lines do not align perfectly next to each other, a sort of marginal space emerges around Topman, and from this position local residents can create monetary gains from the sale of cocoa to either country. The concept of ‘marginal gains’ has been intricately studied by anthropologist Jane Guyer in her 2004 book of the same title. In this work Guyer researches the multitude of different currencies and exchange systems that had once been used across pre-colonial and early colonial Atlantic Africa. According to Guyer the forms of exchanges that took place across different currency systems presented particular opportunities for individuals to make profits. As Guyer wrote: “When one scale is not exactly reducible to the terms of another, a margin for gain lies in the negotiation of situational matching.” (ibid: 51). Cast in this light, the many entrenched boundary contestations and uncertainties amid these cocoa farming Ghanaian borderlands can, I argue, be reinterpreted as value generating spaces, since such vacuous, overlapping, or encroaching boundary discrepancies create margins that in turn enable particular opportunities for value generation.

As the presented case of Topman has shown, such marginal spaces for profit generation through cocoa may come about through incidental incommensurability of different administrative systems, as well as through deliberate opportunistic acts or selective passivity among human actors. Both these types of perspectives I shall continue to explore over the following chapters, starting with an enquiry into the many boundaries and value generating activities observable in the commercial cocoa transport sector of Ghana, specifically as pertains the so-called ‘commodity chain’ of cocoa.

CHAPTER 2:

COCOA IN CHAINS AND COCOA ON TRUCKS

"Chako driver-side! - - - Chako mate-side!"

[Steer to the driver's side! - - - Steer to the mate's side!]

Ali and Prince shouted at the top of their lungs as they ran barefoot next to our heavy cocoa truck while it careened backwards down the hillside.

Seconds ago both men had jumped from their seats inside the truck at the realisation that the worn down gear shift had failed and the truck's struggling forward climb was about to be reversed. With no time to put on shoes or flip flops they had rushed out the passenger side door, leaving only the driver Muhammed and an instantly worried anthropologist inside.

The shouts of Ali and Prince were barely audible inside the cab despite the open side windows. The brakes of the undercarriage were screeching away while the suddenly unburdened engine roared out in futility. Brake! – release..., Brake! – release..., Brake! – release...

Muhammed's frantic series of stomps on the brake pedal and pulls on the handbrake sent the creaking truck suspensions into series of vibrations that violently jolted the cabin and sent loose items tumbling around. A pen, an old cable-charging cell phone, a dusty oil rag, a homemade slingshot, a roll of electrician's tape, a partially consumed cluster of bananas, and other sundry items were rapidly being shaken from their storage spots atop the instrument panel to find new temporary resting places on our laps, between the seats, or on the floor. Amid anxious glances at the side view mirrors and the – thankfully – currently empty road behind us, the forward view to the lush tropical hilltop ahead grew increasingly distant.

Making a full stop on the incline turned out to be impossible, so what the team now tried to do was to minimize the backwards momentum while counterpoising the angle of the truck to the careening trailer in a frantic attempt to keep both vehicles on the road till the valley below. If just one rear wheel of the trailer were to drop into one of the steep rainwater ditches along the roadsides it might topple the entire truck violently onto its side, damaging its chassis beyond repair, rupture the cargo hold, and also likely injure the people on board. In Ghana tow trucks were in notoriously short supply and badly damaged vehicles were often just scavenged for parts by their owners and the remains

then left on the roadsides where they crashed. Thus, the four of us had no lack of recent visual impressions of battered wrecks from our earlier journey in mind as our truck went back downhill. The reversed wind flow now also brought a sour-sweet smell to permeate the dusty air in the cab, and when breathing in we were served an olfactory reminder of our valuable cargo which had so suddenly turned into a deadly weight pulling on our backs; 38.4 tonnes of fermented cocoa beans.

A silent massive weight. A dense unwieldy volume. A thick sour-sweet smell. Such compounded sensual impressions was how cocoa most often presented itself to the people working on the rough roads of Ghana, hauling cargoes of cocoa from the many inland depots and down to the coastal ports. The journey together with Ali, Muhammed, and Prince was one of several occasions where I had the opportunity to travel together with a team of Ghanaian truckers as they made their way from the cocoa depots of the distant frontier town of Bonsu Nkwanta and down to the port city of Tema. I had initially sought to join such truck rides in an attempt to directly follow Ghanaian cocoa beans as those products were transported all the way along the so-called 'commodity chain', from the trees of the farmlands to the oceangoing ships of the ports. What I encountered made me reflect critically on the concept of commodity chains, as well as more widely on notions of structures and movement - and ultimately on theoretical approaches to the value of cocoa in both a social and an economic sense. The exploration of these issues is what this chapter is all about.

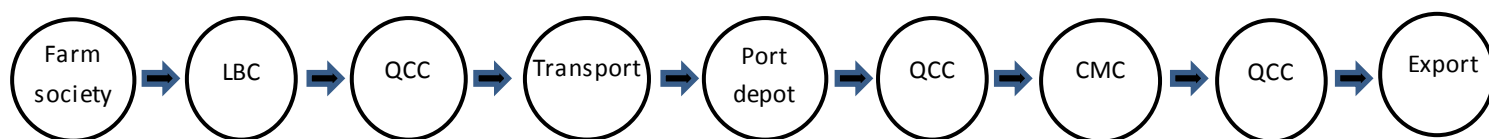
The crux of the matter ahead concerns the stark contrast between the significance ascribed to Ghanaian cocoa among truckers and (as we shall imminently see) transport logistics personnel, even as either party formally collaborates with the other in bringing cargoes of cocoa across Ghana, from rural depots to portside warehouses. The discrepancies between the socio-economic values ascribed to such volumes of cocoa inform the discussion of theory undertaken in the latter part of this chapter. To anticipate, I will suggest that a common denominator between the two parties may be identified through an analysis that treats both 'space' and 'value' as interdependent and inherently performative dynamic concepts.

First, though, a brief postscript to the events described above: Somehow, on this suddenly dramatic day, through both luck and the skilful efforts of the team, our truck had managed to remain on the road and eventually come to a grinding halt at the bottom of the hill. To the relief of us all, neither had anyone been injured nor had other vehicles appeared on the countryside road behind us. The whole team breathed in quiet relief for a few minutes afterwards and voiced some few thankful words of prayers. Then, after sharing a few more comments among each other and after regathering their resolve, Mohammed put the truck engine back into gear and pressed down hard on the gas pedal.

This time, hopefully, we would have better luck on the climb and not least on making that final crucial gear shift before reaching the crest of the hill.

Chained Flows of Cocoa

In the main transport logistics building of the PBC (Produce Buying Company) in the port of Tema the senior official carefully drew a series of circles on a piece of paper. Then he scribbled a few letters inside each circle and linked each to the adjacent one with a series of arrows. The elderly official was a bulky man with an imposing figure, wearing a black tailor-made business suit with intricate gold stringed embroidery around the neckline, the colours of which matched the golden frames of his reading glasses. As we sat in the dimmed light of his air-conditioned office, an image of what he referred to as the Ghanaian cocoa commodity chain gradually emerged on the paper on the work desk between us.



Returning his gaze to me over the brim of his glasses and pointing a finger to his finished drawing the official slowly explained the contents of each circle. First, one had the local societies of farmers that produced and sold the cocoa beans. Then there were the LBCs (Licensed Buying Companies) that purchased the cocoa and put it into standardized 64kg sacks at their local depots. Then came tests and approvals by the governmental QCC (Quality Control Company), followed by truck transport from inland depots to the portside warehouses. At that point there would be another QCC inspection before the CMC (Cocoa Marketing Company - the monopolistic business agency owned by the Ghanaian government) would take over and sell the cocoa, which would finally be quality tested one last time before becoming exported to the world market through international shipping companies. In total, the official stated, these circles constituted the entirety of the Ghanaian commodity chain of cocoa. Cocoa was in this way produced and moved along the chain towards the foreign customers, and in return money came to Ghana and was distributed to each link of the chain all the way back to the farming communities. After finishing his walkthrough, the senior official reclined back in his chair again,

exhaled heavily, and gave me a pensive look before asking: “Was there anything more you needed to know?”

I still had several more questions in mind regarding the intricacies of this Ghanaian cocoa business, yet none of my further efforts to expand the topic of our conversation succeeded beyond somewhat terse replies by the official that all pointed back to various parts of the chain imagery already pencilled onto the paper on the work desk. The unilinear flow of cocoa in one direction and money in another was how this system prescribed things to be, and to the probing questions of a curious foreign visitor, such as myself, everything that took place in the Ghanaian cocoa business, I was assured, indeed happened in full accordance with the links of this very system.

Of course, the actual practices of the Ghanaian cocoa business were in fact quite more complex than that, and, to recall, as a resident of Topman village had previously explained, any society would always have a few people breaking the rules while the majority abided the law (see Chapter 1, p.37). I shall however leave aside the topic of cheating and corruption for the latter part of this thesis (Chapter 5) and for the time being focus on the ubiquitousness of this ‘commodity chain’ imagery itself, and the implications of this system which purportedly renders a near perfect abstracted overview of the types of activities carried out across the Ghanaian cocoa business.

First, what I wrote in my fieldnotes later that same day was that it had been with a distinct sense of disappointment that I had taken my leave from the office of the senior PBC representative. The official’s usage of the commodity chain terminology along with his stringent and categorical explanation of the Ghanaian cocoa sector had appeared already so familiar to me that I at first thought that I had learned nothing new about the country’s cocoa business that I had not already encountered before in the literature¹³ as well as during previous fieldwork interviews. Similar general overviews had already been outlined to me when I had met with both deputy administrators of the governmental COCOBOD agency in Accra as well as with a manager of the Maersk shipping company in the port of Tema. One thing these people shared in common was responsibilities for large-scale logistics and issues concerning people, cocoa, and profitability, and similar to much of the scholarly literature they based their understandings on an application of certain levels of generalizations and abstractions.

¹³ Detailed commodity chain analyses of the Ghanaian cocoa sector could for instance be found in Mohammed et al. (2011); World Bank (2011); UNCTAD (2008), and numerous other academic or business stakeholder publications.

The term ‘commodity chains’ and its various related expressions as ‘supply chains’ or ‘value chains’ has become mainstays of a wide range of academic as well as business oriented literature since the middle of the 1980s. One of the earliest academic theorizations of this “chain imagery” was in Hopkins and Wallerstein’s concept of ‘commodity chains’ in World Systems Theory as a “network of labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity” (1986: 159). The 1990s had brought along various further attempts at developing commodity chain analyses, including the widely used addition of the ‘global’ term, emphasizing a more ambitious – if not even an implied holistic – scope of analysis. Before the turn of the millennium further arguments were advanced in favour of replacing the ‘commodity’ term with ‘value’, the idea being that ‘global value chains’ constituted a more inclusive term for interdisciplinary collaboration across different studies of production networks (Bair 2008: 12). Some authors even suggested that ‘global commodity chains’ and ‘global value chains’ could by and large even be treated as interchangeable terms (Daviron & Ponte 2005: 28), whereas the ‘supply chain’ imagery tended to remain most widely used in applied commercial settings (and of course as part of analyses of such proscribed settings, see for example Tsing (2009, 2015)). Regardless of prefix terms, since the late twentieth century researchers as well as political and business based decision makers alike have made frequent recourse to concepts involving imagery of ‘chains’ or ‘networks’ in order to describe the processes by which goods and services are produced, moved, and consumed over distances in time and space. Academic disciplines particularly inclined to adopt these theoretical approaches include among others sociology, geography, and development studies, while popular uses outside academia, as mentioned, include business management and government administrations.

For cocoa, as for many other types of goods, the geographical distances involved – from tropical growth origins to consumption typically in places of more temperate climates – necessitate movement of the commodified goods across numerous boundaries as it is repeatedly transacted between different institutional and commercial entities and not least passed along between different people. One thing that the chain concept, from its early expression in World Systems Theory and onward, recognises is that while the commodity moved remains recognisable as the same object type, the segmentations along the way signify the delimited experiential horizons of any individual or group of people engaged in the handling and processing of the same object. Rarely will any one actor be capable of following a good all the way, especially if it is a commercial good requiring movement over long distances and/or several steps of processing, which each requires specialized knowledge to perform. The formal overview presentation I was given in the PBC logistics office stood to me as a logical, typical, and on the whole quite predictable representation of the Ghanaian cocoa sector circumscribed into the form of a ‘commodity chain’; One clearly defined good, cocoa, gradually

accumulates value as it is moved through a predefined series of transactions between predefined groups of actors, each of the latter obtaining parts of the monetary profits generated through each act of exchange. What a commodity chain depiction thus intends to show is, literally, “business as usual”.

Caution against Self-enclosing Systems for Analytical Purposes

To merely reproduce such already familiar commodity chain perspectives on the Ghanaian cocoa sector was, however, not at all what had enticed me to return to this West African nation for ethnographic PhD fieldwork. Rather, what had spurred me on had been a gradually growing impression that a kind of conceptual gridlock had somehow come to stifle the engagements of several major foreign donors, development stakeholders, business agents, international bodies, or what have you, in the ways in which these actors engaged themselves in their interactions with the Ghanaian and larger West African region and societies¹⁴. From my previous engagements with the foreign development sector in Ghana over the course of the first decade of the 2000s¹⁵ I experienced first-hand how certain systems of engagements had become hegemonic for the ways in which initially the funding providers/investors, and subsequently the funding recipients, envisaged and engaged each other. Primary among these hegemonic insitencies, from a Danish institutional perspective, was the universal application of the so-called ‘Logical Framework Approach’ (LFA). The LFA system had since 1989 formed the mandatory framework for all development interventions to be funded through the Danish government’s international development institution, Danida (Danida 1996). This particular tool for designing and managing development projects (among other forms of use) works by setting up lists of goals to be achieved within given timeframes, along with listings of required inputs, expected outputs, means of verification, as well as delegation of responsibilities among all involved partners. Through the application of the LFA-system, a particular sort of perspective is forcefully projected onto the targeted societies and into the present time as well as an imagined near future; people become uniformly recast

¹⁴ Of course, this sort of swathing critical claim is likely to ruffle the feathers of many a professional who relies on any well-established concepts or systems as part of their own work-applied toolsets. If one finds adequate utility within a given framework it may, obviously, not seem stifled or gridlocked at all. In the present context I still hope the reader will bear with me as I continue to develop this chapter’s argument in favour of not precluding any tools for academic analysis from the critical scrutiny of the analysis itself.

¹⁵ First as a six-year part time volunteer with a Danish government supported grassroots NGO (The Ghana Friendship Groups) implementing various development projects in northern Ghana, and then later on as a student intern with the Danish embassy in Accra from 2008-09.

as populations of stakeholders and beneficiaries, and their physical environment becomes organized and subdivided into boxes of resources and recipients, actions and results, dates and deadlines.

Surprisingly to me, despite the purported clarity of such systematized development efforts, which since the early 2000s have included politically charged buzzwords of ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’, and ‘good governance’, etc., the means of verification as to whether such ephemeral target goals have been achieved only rarely include funding mechanisms for post implementation impact assessments placed years into the future where the largest effects would have become more fully evident. Instead, all too often success criteria are based on measurements of immediately quantifiable outputs, allowing more lofty overall project ambitions of “society developments” that are to become considered as achieved by way of plausible extrapolations from the intended effects of the specific interventions. For instance, if more rural school classrooms being built mean that more girls could attend school, then more girls attending school would mean that more girls on average would achieve higher levels of education, and more highly educated girls would presumably in turn seek to participate more actively in public decision making, which would then mean that a project funder’s overall aim of creating a more gender-equal society could be presumed to have been achieved. Similarly to the suppositions of the commodity chain imagery, an interconnected series of interactions are envisaged through the LFA system as proceeding from a specified starting point to a desired end point with intermediate stages consisting of distinctive, clearly definable steps, a causal chain of cumulative processes that lead invariably towards a predefined overall goal. In the Ghanaian development intervention landscape of the 1990s and 2000s a multitude of four to five year projects followed each other like products on a conveyor belt while limited time contracted development professionals shifted job positions with a similar or faster rhythm¹⁶. At every turnover point, in my experience, much knowledge and many learned lessons were lost, especially those forms of personal experiences that did not fit into the pre-defined systematic frameworks of documentation. As anthropologists Katy Gardner and David Lewis have sharply pointed out (2006), the development industry’s emphasis on compartmentalized structures has reached a degree by which even critique of the existing system has to be formulated within the framework established by that very system, in order to stand a chance of being perceived as valid and potentially relevant by the system’s practitioners. How might it be possible to advance beyond such a self-enclosed system that inadvertently – perhaps – has become resistant even to change intended as self-improvement?

¹⁶ As for the many non-professional development volunteers the rhythm was typically even faster as one of months rather than years.

Exacerbating the confinements I experienced at the time of my own involvements in the development business in Ghana was a sense of insufficiency in at least parts of mainstream humanistic and social scientific theories towards coming up with compelling alternative visions of ways to advance development efforts beyond the consolidated constraints of the present systems. Among the administrators of governmental and non-governmental development interventions I interacted with, several presented the significance of their own current work practices through concepts and terms based on their own educational backgrounds in Western academic environments of the 1980s and 1990s, including influences by scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, to mention two of the more recurrent names. As an academic researcher of the early 21st century doing fieldwork in the wake of decades of university student throughputs in, say, the Foucauldian tradition, I frequently found myself encountering academically educated informants who fashioned themselves as fellow academics and who habitually referred to concepts such as ‘habitus’ and ‘discourse analysis’ as part of their own post-academic everyday work. Both of these approaches have earned high degrees of recognition and appreciation across much of the academic world, and both have indeed enabled researchers to generate far reaching and nuanced insights into human sociality. Yet, for instance, with Caldwell’s (2007) critical discussion of the limits of Foucault’s ‘discourse’ term in mind, I pondered whether I – as a contemporary researcher – should then proceed with an ouroboros of a “discourse analysis of discourse analyses”, or, perhaps, for this very reason, instead take pause and wonder whether ‘discourse’ itself might at this point have become a thought-hampering conceptual totality in need of new critical academic attention? All due respect to the original and impactful works of Foucault, Hopkins and Wallerstein, and other once radical refreshers of academic lines of thinking, but if World Systems Theory, commodity chain analysis, or discourse analysis were each to be considered as be-all, end-all academic toolsets through which one might explore the human condition, the works of scholars would soon become partially comparable to the works of franchise restaurant chefs repeating already fixed recipes. On the contrary, I find that characteristically for each generation of academic researchers have been unceasing pursuits of ever new and refined methods for knowledge creation more so than complacent custodianship of the existing. After all, the idealised research metaphor is to strive to stand atop the shoulders of giants rather than remaining on the ground, supporting oneself by latching onto a giant’s hand.

To specify, the criticism I am raising here is not intended as a blanket rejection of the works of the abovementioned academic theorists nor of ‘commodity chains’ neither in its various theoretic nor applied forms. The ‘chain’ imagery offers great utility for a number of purposes, whether logistical or analytical, which its ubiquitous applications across the contemporary human world is quite

a testament to. However, what I am cautioning against is any case where the wide ranging utility of any particular toolset for purposes of analysis precludes that very toolset from becoming an object of analysis itself.

My initial impression of disappointment as I had left the PBC logistics office in Tema, caused by the already familiar information I was given during the interview, was soon replaced by a dawning realisation that it was becoming necessary for me in this fieldwork to relegate my existing notions of a ‘commodity chain’ of cocoa (and its variant expressions of ‘value’ and ‘supply’) to the same mental spot as I had already phased the concepts of LFAs and the theoretical terms of some, arguably, rather entrenched academic schools of thought; as – by necessity – objects of analysis more so than tools for analysis.

Approaching the commodity chain instead as an analytical object, as something that shapes perceptions of reality rather than merely describing reality immediately offers a pathway to a different analytical perspective: To the senior PBC official and his fellow logistics department colleagues, the institutionalized cocoa commodity chain description apparently constitutes the primary way in which this type of natural good becomes expressed in their line of work. Rarely – if ever – would an actual bag of cocoa need to be brought into their office building, but cocoa transcribed into the forms of transport waybills, lot numbers, and depot allocations are nevertheless integral parts of their work days. The linked categorical units of an abstracted commodity chain system would, peculiarly, seem to stand out in this place as the real material component, whereas the cocoa on the other hand comes to constitute an ephemeral, perpetually moving flow. The flow of cocoa through this system is premised on the serialized positioning of multiple boundaries – the linkages of the chain – where the nominally increased value of the commercial good in each subsequent section entices each actor to pass the good to the next one in order to reap the value difference, the profits. Meanwhile the formalized collaboration structure between the chain participants presents a closed-off unidirectional system that precludes outside others from partaking in the processes and from gaining parts of these profits.

The advantage for business purposes of self-representation through a chain-like organisation structure over an appearance as an unsegmented uniform entity reflects certain basic conceptual qualities. Anthropologist Tim Ingold has pointed out how a terminology of connection based around imagery of a chain differs importantly from one based on a continuous line: “Chains are articulated from rigid elements or links, and retain their connections even when tension is released. Yet they have no memory of their formation. Knots, by contrast, are not articulated and do not connect.

They have no links. Nevertheless they retain within their constitution a memory of the process of their formation.” (Ingold 2015: 15). Through Ingold’s disambiguation it shows that a particular quality of a chain is its capability to represent interdependent connectedness while each link nevertheless retains its independence from any permanent memory-inducing events that might otherwise affect it through the causing of stress elsewhere, as could happen through such actions as knotting or pulling of a rope. Connecting Ingold’s suggestion of the conceptual qualities of chains with, for instance, anthropologist Hannah Appel’s (2012a, 2012b) analyses of corporate commercial ideas of modular business units and ongoing efforts toward legal and perceptual disassociation from outside local surroundings further underscores the basic attractiveness of the chain metaphor over one of lines for commercial business practices. Not only are large-scale business endeavours organized into components each managed by specialized groups of people for work task optimization purposes, but furthermore do such forms of legal, formalised, organizationally compartmentalized responsibilities help prevent negative events (for instance, certain product manufacturing failures or legal consequences of exposed illegal activities) from impacting the commercial organisation as a whole – as would more likely have been the case if collaborating business entities were imagined through a rope metaphor.

The practices of the various commodity/value/supply chain approaches likewise appear either like prescriptions for what ought to take place, as in theorizations of economically optimized business practices, or as theorizations of more overall national, international or global social processes, as initially envisioned in World Systems sociology and later on in development studies. Designations of a single product (whether a “simple” natural good, like cocoa, tea, gold, or apples, or another one combined of multiple components from multiple sources, like, say, a cell phone or a car) as the focal point of a so-called ‘–chain’ analysis perspective has several consequences: Not only does the object of study become reified as a singular type of commodity in the world, but furthermore does this view entail that the envisaged chain from production to consumption gains focal and analytical primacy, becoming in effect a ‘core’ to which the rest of the surroundings (immediate as well as distant) will stand as ‘periphery’. One way of understanding this effect can perhaps be done through the use of the term ‘virtualism’ (Carrier & Miller 1998), designating instances where the abstract (economic) theory becomes the deciding factor, to which reality is sought to conform and people’s behaviour is shaped to fit. As a profound consequence of such persistent efforts by business actors to shape, enact, and ‘optimize’ commodity chain systems, this ‘core//periphery’ perspective comes to appear as an oddly inverted reflection of the World Systems approach that once offered us an imagery of a world separated into ‘metropolises’ and ‘periphery’, into ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. Instead, through the singular focus on the essentialized chain and the optimization of monetary profits, one may no longer be dealing so much

with social and material inequality among people, as one may be dealing with a situation where, through the established production systems, the flows of commercial goods increasingly constitute the centre and humans the periphery.

As participant in the enactment of an applied commodity chain of cocoa the senior official of the Ghanaian portside logistics office described the transport of this good largely as a one-step linear process of movement from one storage unit to another. His department's electronic (or, as of 2014, still quite often telephonic) issuance of a waybill (i.e. an invoice ordering a delivery of a specified amount of goods from one place to another) results days later in the confirmation of the arrival of a cocoa-laden truck at another warehouse. To the Ghanaian logistics personnel the indication of one distinct 'transport' link of the cocoa commodity chain serves as a convenient circumscription of any and all processes actually involved in this so-called 'secondary evacuation' of cocoa, as it is also termed¹⁷. Alternatively, not only is the perceptual vantage point of those people involved in the actual movement of such invoiced cocoa through the landscape entirely different, but in fact none of the truck workers I travelled with even considered themselves as participants in a commodity chain – nor did they express any knowledge of such a concept at all. Since my fieldwork involved enquiries into both the administrative and the menial parts of this Ghanaian cocoa transport business, my notes accordingly came to include very different accounts of the significance ascribed to the – purportedly same – volumes of cocoa, by these people formally working together¹⁸.

To anticipate the discussion in the latter third part of this present chapter, this finding has prompted me to look for works of academic theory useful for analysis of how all these people collaborated around the movement of cocoa, despite seemingly incommensurable perspectives on the very nature of what was at stake. The search prompts a discussion of different academic approaches to value generation, which I will engage as perspectives revolving around value understood as related primarily to either spatial dimensions and essences on the one hand, or boundaries and transaction processes on the other. In order to explore these matters more closely I shall, however, first return to a more detailed look into the cocoa truck ride-along case, with which I opened this chapter.

¹⁷ i.e. the movement of cocoa between rural and portside warehouses. The 'primary evacuation' is in turn defined as taking place from farm communities to rural LBC depots and is usually undertaken by LBC affiliates such as purchasing clerks or depot boys. More on this in Chapter 5.

¹⁸ 'formally' here as partaking in activities within the same cocoa commodity chain link described as 'transport'.



Image 4: Cocoa truck laden with 600 bags has been prepared for departure outside a PBC company depot in the town of Bonsu Nkwanta, Western Region, Ghana. March 2014.

Travelling along a Link in the Chain

With a loud roar the engine of the heavy DAF truck burst back into action, spewing billowing black clouds of exhaust fumes across the dusty courtyard outside the cocoa depot. Standing beside the parked truck, I scampered to drag my backpack out of the immediate path of the smoke while my future road companions yelled loud commands to each other in their hurried efforts to stabilize the engine. From the open cab door the driver, Mohammed, held on to the steering wheel with one hand as he leaned out, looking back towards the rear end of the parked truck where the fitter, Prince, squatted on the chassis and relayed information to and from the mechanic, Ali, who had squeezed himself halfway into the narrow confines of the engine compartment in order to adjust the machinery within. Weeks of inactivity were finally at an end as the team of three truckers readied themselves to take a cargo of more than 38 tonnes of cocoa beans on a roughly 500km journey from Bonsu Nkwanta to the Ghanaian port city of Tema.

Ali was the most senior of the group, having worked in the business for about 11 years already. He was 30 years old, married and had a wife, a young daughter, and an infant son who lived

with him in a rented house in Ashaiman, a sprawling suburban town just inland of Tema that primarily housed labourers and functionaries who worked in the port city's various industries. He would stay with them during portside downtimes between jobs, but most of the time he would be travelling on the roads of Ghana, either as a call-upon mechanic hired to fix broken down trucks, or as a crewmember on certain trucks, such as the current one. Ali furthermore had some relatives living near Bonsu Nkwanta, and thus, as he had lately been waiting around for this particular truck's departure, he had passed the time helping the family on their cocoa farm.

Muhammed was in his late twenties, also married, and had recently come from Tamale in Northern Region of Ghana in search of employment as a truck driver. A recommendation from another driver had brought him to the owner of this haulage company, who had assigned him to this particular truck. Muhammed viewed cocoa as just another type of good to be transported and no different from, say if he was bringing a load of cement or tiles inland from the ports. In the northern savannah areas where he grew up, he explained, there were no cocoa trees around due to the drier climate of the region, so beforehand he only knew of cocoa's importance to the country through the talks of other Ghanaians, as well as through various commercial ads shown on national television, radio, and in major newspapers (e.g.: "Asaase Wura"¹⁹ – Harvest more cocoa – Earn more money", as a well-known slogan went for a widely advertised brand of cocoa fertilizer).

Prince was a 24 year old guy from the inland area of Accra, unmarried, and who had recently started out in the haulage business as a fitter and truck-mate, handling some of the more physically demanding tasks on the way, such as the changing of spare tyres, fixings of cargo, and handling of spare parts and tools. Like Ali, Prince had family living near Bonsu Nkwanta, and so he was used to spending downtime between transport jobs helping out on his relatives' cocoa farm.

In the commercial port city of Tema the owner of the truck, a Ghanaian independent business man, who the team addressed as 'Mr. Sammy', now waited for them to deliver the cargo of cocoa beans, for which he had finally obtained a haulage contract with the PBC. The business of transporting cocoa in Ghana fluctuated a lot with the seasons. Most Licenced Buying Companies maintained their own permanent truck fleet that throughout the year transported steady flows of cocoa from their rural depots to the ports, in accordance with the orders issued by the governmental CMC

¹⁹ Twi expression that can be translated roughly as: "The gold of the soil". At the time of writing the Asaase Wura brand is owned and marketed by the *Yara International* company, a subsidiary of the *Norsk Hydro* corporation.

(Cocoa Marketing Company) that handled all sales and exports. In the peak production periods known as the ‘main crop’ from approximately October to March and the ‘light crop’ from around June to August the need for additional truck rides rose accordingly and thereby provided job opportunities for independent haulage contractors, such as Mr. Sammy and this team of truckers. The competition among such private contractors in Ghana was quite fierce, I learned, and therefore it was not unusual for trucks to wait in line for months at a time outside rural cocoa depots in order to secure a single contract for a cargo haul to the coast. Later, when I met Mr. Sammy, he explained to me that such cocoa contracts were lucrative enough that just making 2-3 hauls per season made it worth the wait compared to seeking other haulage jobs in the mean time – and in fact, getting an early spot in line at a depot ahead of the main season’s start made a huge difference, since otherwise you might not be able to return quickly enough to the line of waiting trucks to get a third contract before the end of the season²⁰. For this reason, being a worker in the Ghanaian cocoa transport business typically involved long periods of downtime as the driver and his mate (or in this case, the driver, fitter, and mechanic) camped in the vicinity of the parked truck for weeks or months at a time in between jobs. During these times the driver in particular would be expected to sleep in or by the truck to deter potential thieves from attempting to steal it, and for his service the truck owner would pay him so-called ‘sitting money’, typically some 10 GH¢ per day to cover his basic expenses for water, food, and soap.

On this day, as the engine of the truck settled into a stable humming, the team of three young men all expressed relief that their moment of departure had finally arrived. Although they were all used to the often lengthy downtimes around rural cocoa depots while parked in line for the next job, a technical problem with their truck had this time added an additional two unanticipated days to their wait. Ali related with the detailed words of a specialist how our transport vehicle for this trip, a chestnut coloured DAF 95XF truck, had originally been manufactured in the Netherlands in 1998 for use in Great Britain, but around 2010 it had been resold to Mr. Sammy who had it shipped to Ghana. Here the truck had been extensively retrofitted for the Ghanaian roads, including a complete shift of its steering components from the right hand side of the cab to the left. Ali added how he had in fact done that entire procedure by himself over the course of a week, and so by now he felt fully attuned to every sound coming from this very machine. DAF trucks, he said, were very popular in Ghana since spare parts were easy to come by and maintenance of the trucks required fewer specialized tools than, for instance, MAN or Scania type trucks. Practically all privately owned trucks on the Ghanaian roads were

²⁰ For a closer discussion of these and other matters related to the Ghanaian independent cocoa haulage business, see Chapter 5.

second-hand vehicles, imported primarily from Europe, Ali explained. The particular delay on our current departure had happened because the slightly battered truck had now stood still for about three months or so outside the rural depot, enduring both harsh sunlight and torrential rains, which had caused the improvised tape-wrapped insulation around the truck's external positioned battery wiring to fail and the batteries to de-charge. Therefore, the moment the team had finally managed to spark the engine again had been the first important obstacle overcome on the journey, while still ahead laid the long and likely arduous way to the port.

Here at the departure point in the rural frontier town of Bonsu Nkwanta, a local team of menial depot workers – so-called 'depot boys' – had beforehand loaded the entire cargo in place on the truck trailer, each worker carrying one 64 kg bag on his head at a time. These 600 bags had subsequently been covered with a waterproof tarpaulin, which had finally been fixed in place with crisscrossing lengths of rope which were carefully tied down to the trailer deck. This measure was officially required of all Ghanaian cocoa transports in order to prevent any additional moisture from entering the hygroscopic beans, in addition to keeping other potential pollutants from the outside environment from mixing with the goods (e.g. rainwater, fuel spillage, smoke, or dust), and of course also in order to prevent human or animal pilfering of contents enroute. The standard government-issued cocoa haulage contracts held the contractor liable for any wet, contaminated, or missing bags, which would be checked for by the receiving officials at the portside depot, so the team took care to check the integrity of the tarpaulin coverage before we left. With the cargo thus sealed off, the waybill signed for, and the engine running our cocoa truck was now all ready for departure. This moment, I had to remind myself, corresponded somehow to the beginning of the transport link of the PBC official's commodity chain presentation.

Interestingly, about two days into the future, when we were currently scheduled to reach our destination, our cargo would be considered worth substantially more than it was right now. At the moment each of the 600 bags on board was registered by a value of 212 GH¢²¹, which was the official government ordained purchasing price offered by all LBCs to farmers. However, once a truck arrived at a portside warehouse the value of a carried bag would instead be considered equivalent to 320 GH¢. As a Ghanaian COCOBOD employee had explained to me, this increase reflected the estimated replacement costs of a bag that incidentally got damaged or lost during transport to the coast. From a

²¹ To note, this was contemporary 2013-14 season prices. Official domestic purchasing prices were subsequently adjusted up for the 2014-15 season, in part to reflect significant exchange value losses of the Ghanaian Cedi to the US Dollar over the same period.

commodity chain perspective, the value added here appears logical, as it follows as a consequence of the cocoa being moved one link further along the chain towards the ultimate endpoint as a consumable commercial product. On the other hand, from the perspective of a person working on the truck that carried the actual cocoa, this value increase made much less sense. I was told by the truck team that only few people in Ghana paid real attention to this particular value increase, since all cocoa was technically already considered government property once it left the rural depot, and also it would only truly be exchanged for money later, once it was sold to foreign purchasers. Even then, the money earned befell to the national government, which would use it to pay back the billion-dollar short-term international banking loans they annually obtained in order to be able to pay the country's cocoa farmers up front for their produce²². To the truckers the high replacement cost of cocoa bags lost during domestic transport served instead primarily as a discrete warning for trucking teams to handle their cargo with care lest they jeopardise their profits. The cocoa bags themselves, the team assured me, were stored safely under the tarpaulin and should by all means remain in exactly the same condition when they were offloaded as they had been when they were put on the trailer in Bonsu Nkwanta. Still, on the offhand chance that a bag would somehow become lost or spoiled despite all of these measures, the team was confident that they could simply arrange to replace it with another 212 GH¢ bag from a rural depot. None of the three truckers could remember having heard of someone actually paying the 320 GH¢ replacement cost at the port, and when I later posed the same question to one of the officials at the PBC logistics office in Tema the official replied that he believed that out of the 3.500 or so commercial (and hence, non-PBC) truckloads that he and his colleagues procured every year, no more than 10 to 20 of them would likely experience such an issue where a bag of cocoa needed replacement – and even so, only few if any of those cases actually resulted in the haulage contractors paying the official replacement cost to the government rather than simply delivering another bag instead. So, despite the clear formality of the price increase mandated by the transaction of the cocoa between the rural and the portside commodity chain links, in practical application much more flexibility remained.

Another practical difference, as already briefly mentioned, was that unlike the presentation by the senior PBC logistics official, none of the truckers I travelled with characterised themselves as working within a particular link in a commodity chain, nor did they even express any knowledge of or interest in the concept of a 'chain' of goods. Instead, these truck workers emphasized entirely the significance of their hands-on everyday challenges involved in making a livelihood through

²² For instance, in the 2014-15 cocoa season the Ghanaian government had borrowed a total of 1.7 billion USD to finance their domestic cocoa purchases (The Daily Graphic, September 2nd 2015).

the long-distance movement of cocoa. All three young men on this day knew the route to the coast by heart, albeit none of them expressed strong confidence from the onset that our task of driving there would be a simple routine undertaking. Instead, each of them said short prayers for smooth and uneventful travels before all four of us squeezed into the cab and rolled out from the rural depot courtyard. Our journey began easily and without further delaying incidents, and with an average speed rarely exceeding 20 km/h we made it about 10 km onto the countryside dirt roads before the sudden burst of a rear trailer tyre heralded the first of numerous setbacks that would soon come to confront us.



Image 5: I had strong doubts about the durability of this particular tyre as the cocoa truck started its approx. 500 km journey. Luckily, this one lasted all the way to the port without puncturing. Rural Sefwi, March 2014.

Aboard the cocoa carrying truck it quickly became evident that the cocoa's passive presence hardly ever seemed to benefit the persons whose job was to move it, and instead this cargo listlessly resisted all their attempts at both accelerating and decelerating the truck. The heavy weight of the cocoa also strained the wheel suspensions to their near maximal capacity whenever a deep pothole was hit or a speed ramp was crossed, with the resulting counterforces from the suspensions shaking the whole cab violently, flinging people against their seatbelts, and jostling loose lying items around inside. Additionally, carrying the heavy cargo through the decrepit road network was very tough on the wheels, and burst tyres were not uncommon incidents – as we had so soon been reminded on our own journey.

The truck's owner, Mr. Sammy, would later explain to me how it was common practice among independent haulage contractors in Ghana to only replace worn down tyres when they actually burst, since the profit margins of their business were already slim and even a single replacement tyre could easily cost the same as the net amount of money profited from one single cocoa haulage contract. Instead, Mr. Sammy said, the teams would gradually shift their most worn down tyres back onto the rear axles of the cargo trailer to minimize the risk that a blowout would cause the moving truck to crash, and beyond this one safety measure, he added, "We just go and pray that nothing breaks".



Image 6: A depot boy takes a nap on the back of a small truck as it returns from a 'primary evacuation' of cocoa from a handful of farming societies. Rural feeder road near Juaboso, September 2015.

Rhythms of the Road

The road network of contemporary rural Ghana consists to a large part of rough dirt and gravel roads. Main roads between provincial town centres and larger cities are paved, but only few sections offer more than one lane in either direction²³. Additionally, the frequent torrential rains cause rapid deteriorations of the asphalt with consequent emergence of potholes, all exacerbated by decades of insufficient allocations of public funds for maintenance work²⁴. Then, as common rumours have it, the road problems are made worse by the recurrent application of inferior qualities of asphalt due to illicit cost-cutting practices among contracted roadwork entrepreneurs enabled by lack of government oversight. Thus, decrepit road quality alone makes the driving of a 53.8 tonnes fully loaded truck through the Ghanaian road network no simple task. In addition, all travellers have to deal with the casual, opportunistic driving styles very commonly observable among drivers on Ghanaian roads: This includes vehicles being manoeuvred in broad zigzags through the least pothole-ridden path on the road rather than staying in one's own designated lane to safely avoid opposing traffic. Overtaking just before hilltops or sharp curves happens frequently too – drivers often relying on the interpreted hand signals of slower drivers in front motioning them forward or gesturing them to keep back. The horns of the vehicles are also extensively used by practically all drivers; as communication devices towards other drivers, to propose rides to potential taxi or trotro clients, and as warning signals for pedestrians or the commonly encountered free-roaming farm animals. With an annual road accident fatality rate of 26.2 persons per 100.000 inhabitants Ghana has been ranked as the nation with the 32nd most dangerous traffic conditions in the world (WHO 2015), a ranking which has in all likelihood resulted from a combination of many of the factors mentioned above.

Travellers also have to deal with the significant pollution encountered around the Ghanaian roads, cities, and landscapes in general. Along the largest roads are deep rainwater ditches or open gutters floating with raw sewage. On our cocoa truck we also repeatedly drove choking and sputtering through clouds of road dust, smoke of badly filtered exhaust fumes from vehicles in front,

²³ The few exceptions as of late 2015 are parts of the main road between Kumasi and Accra, as well as the 30kms or so of highway between Accra and Tema, both where two lanes are available in either direction.

²⁴ Anthropologist Gina Porter notes that while road maintenance across several West African nations since the 1980s has suffered due to the impositions of structural adjustment programs, in Ghana these negative effects on the roads have been even more severe due to years of economic recession before the initial governmental adoption of structural adjustment policies (Porter 2002: 286).

roadside coal pot cooking fires, or bonfires of piled up trash that frequently contained significant quantities of plastic. Inside the truck cab all such particles would confront the senses of the truckers, to which my experienced road companions had nevertheless grown more accustomed than I. The hot and humid tropical climate and the insufficient ventilation system meant that often during daytime it seemed unbearably hot to keep the windows closed beyond any more than the worst dusty road stretches or the foulest looking smog screens we were about to traverse. At least while moving forward the constant breeze of air kept the resident smells of leaking diesel fuel, engine oil, and human body sweat at tolerable levels. Meanwhile, the cocoa behind our backs was sheltered from all of this, wrapped up as it was in jute sacks underneath the tarpaulin. During daytime stops, though, the sunlight heat projected onto the cargo trailer still brought forth a densely permeating sour-sweet smell of the cocoa within. I find this rather unique type of olfactory impression quite difficult to describe, but the closest comparison I can give would probably be the – admittedly very contrived – example of the mixed smell that one might imagine would arise by squeezing a volume of viscous sweet sugary cake frosting through the fabric of a very smelly used sports sock. This particular composition of acidic and sweet odours is an inherent characteristic of all fermented cocoa beans and will only later on disappear during the processing of the beans at cocoa roasteries, grinders, and chocolate factories elsewhere. In the cocoa business of Ghana, from forest plantations to portside warehouses, it is a smell recognised by just about everyone.

My fellow road companions all remained quite unfazed by the imposing sensuous intensity of the Ghanaian road networks. Each of them travelled just with a small bag or backpack containing some few personal belongings including a spare pair of jeans and a t-shirt that they would change into upon arrival, and along the way they shared a plastic wash bucket and a piece of soap which enabled each of us to clean up a bit once we made stops at places with access to water, whether at filling stations, villages with boreholes, or at rural streams.

As our truck prodded its way first east and then south we continuously passed along stretches of road where hawkers from improvised stalls or by running alongside the slow-moving vehicles would tout perishable products such as fruits and vegetables, bread, or sometimes bush meat such as fish and river crabs, giant land snails, or grass cutters. Sometimes we would stop to buy travel supplies such as plastic satchel bags of filtered water, a cluster of bananas, a few fried plantains, or some roasted groundnuts. The team made sure to buy most of their food supplies for the next days early on during the journey, since they considered prices in the rural areas to be much cheaper than closer to the towns and cities.



Image 7: Nighttime stop of a cocoa carrying truck at a Kumasi filling station. Time for vehicle maintenance and a few hours of sleep before continuing onwards again before sunrise. March 2014.

A loaded cargo truck journey from Bonsu Nkwanta to Tema normally takes about a day and a half to two days, depending on traffic, mechanical issues, and other unforeseeable causes of delays, and for this reason most truck teams will make stops somewhere for the night, except if they are in a particular rush to meet a delivery deadline or if they have two or more drivers taking turns behind the steering wheel. The finding of safe places to rest was a great concern to all the truckers I travelled with. Persistent rumours had warned about highway bandits lurking in some of the sparsely inhabited forest areas around the first third of the way, and so the teams of truckers placed a priority on driving at least as far as Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, before making an overnight stop. Parking at larger filling stations was a favoured choice in that area, since there would be well illuminated open areas around such places and usually one or more armed watchmen present too. When stopping for sleep the driver would commonly sleep inside the truck, while the mate, mechanic, or other passengers would camp on the ground outdoors, either in the open or sheltered underneath the cargo trailer in case of light rains. During heavy night rains everyone would huddle up inside the truck cab instead.

Towards the end of the journey our truck passed along a particular stretch of road by the town of Ofankor situated at the northern outskirts of Accra in the direction of Kumasi. The everyday life conditions of resident street hawkers of this very town have in recent years been analysed by anthropologist Gabriel Klaeger who has highlighted the local population's use of terms they call 'rush' and 'relax' (Klaeger 2015). From the positions of these people trying to generate monetary incomes by selling products along the side lines of this busy Ghanaian road the changing intensity in the numbers and speeds of vehicles appear as a changing flow between times of 'rush' and times of 'relax'. Business opportunities present themselves best during 'rush' times when the traffic is dense and slow so that the hawkers can move in between the cars and sell goods to travellers through the windows of the vehicles. Alternately, when the traffic chokes completely and cars stand still, new potential customers will take longer time to approach and pass by the hawkers, meaning their business will slow down and eventually force them to sit and 'relax'. The same mode of reduced business opportunities will happen during times of light traffic, which means that vehicles would pass by too quickly for the hawkers to effectively tout their goods.

Klaeger refers to French sociologist Henri Lefebvre's term of 'rhythmanalysis' as he makes the suggestion that the hawkers' daily work becomes defined through their bodily rhythmic enactments as those change between states of activity and states of idleness (ibid: 92). Lefebvre's essay on the social study of rhythms (Lefebvre 2014 [1992]) is based on his prior work titled *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]). In this earlier work Lefebvre calls critical attention to the importance of the social dynamics between people for their perceptions of spatial surroundings, thus making space more than a matter of strictly geographical or architectural features. Lefebvre's insights have over the subsequent decades been influential for what has been called 'the spatial turn' in many academic disciplines, including Africa studies (Engel & Nugent 2010: 2-3).

While still maintaining a strict regional focus on this transport route between Accra and Kumasi I have noticed a historical precedent for this form of tension between spatial distances perceived as either socially enacted or as geographically measured. As the 18th to 19th Century European explorers and colonizers along the coastline of what today is called Ghana had gradually sought to expand and consolidate their colonial territorial claims inland they had encountered numerous difficulties in their efforts to obtain clear information from natives in order to systematically organise and delineate areas of indigenous political authority along with indications of travel distances and even time reckoning. According to historian and Africanist Ivor Wilks one challenge for the colonial powers lay in the different pre-colonial African conception of political space that was mapped mentally rather

than geographically and still operated from a logic of power centres with ambiguous outer bounds (Wilks 1993, 1992). This approach, for instance, meant that the pre-colonial extent of Greater Asante sovereignty was expressed as twenty-one days of travel in either direction from the centre at Kumasi, and even so, such travel days could vary in practice, since traditional beliefs held that certain days were more auspicious than others, and on certain days no travel was advisable at all (Wilks 1992: 181-83; McCaskie 1995: 155). For this reason the territorial claims of Asante were in praxis quite loose and ambiguous along the outermost reaches of the kingdom, in effect corresponding more closely to the term of ‘marches’ than distinct borders²⁵. Further confounding the early European colonizers was that highly different answers were provided by Asante travellers as to how many days of travel lay between Accra and Kumasi. To the pre-colonial Asante the correct answer was contingent on the context of the time when the question was asked and the issue of whether any days of ill luck (and hence no travel) were considered to lay between the present day as a departure day and a later arrival day in Kumasi, all coupled with different individual expectations toward what was considered a reasonable traveling pace and parts of a travel day one would devote to actually walking (ibid). In effect, the pre-colonial Akan reckoning of distance measurements and territorial dimensions relied on shared common knowledge (i.e. the Greater Asante kingdom extended over a territorial claim of twenty-one days of travel in either direction from Kumasi), while the practical application of this knowledge and its division into units was left largely up to the judgment of each traveller (i.e. how far would a person actually move over the course of twenty-one consecutive travel days). Wilks argues that “[i]t is virtually impossible to convert Asante measures of distance into absolute (Newtonian) space and time – into miles per hour” (ibid: 181), yet as a rough approximation Wilks suggests that an Asante courier on a long journey would probably have averaged about ten miles a day (ibid). These flexible spatial categories based on ‘anthropometric distance reckoning’ (ibid: 189) were not compatible with the increasing European colonial insistence on objectively measuring and classifying distances as well as the fixed mapping of the geographical and political features of the interior African continent. For some time, European colonizers had attempted to use the registration of inland pathways as cartographic references and boundary indicators, an approach that they however largely abandoned again as it became understood that such paths were also mobile and dynamically being changed by travellers (Boni 1999: 62).

The crux of these different conceptualizations of spaces and boundaries in this region, I will suggest, can also be understood as revolving around the question of whether the spatial dimensions afforded a given totality should be approached through reference to measurements of absolute

²⁵ For a discussion of this term, see for instance Zartman (1965), as well as this thesis Chapter 3, p.105-106.

quantitative specificity, or rather instead as a qualitative conceptual whole divisible into qualitative parts (say, 21 days of travel – or, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, farm produce divisions of 1/3 or 2/3), a latter approach which leaves the absolute dimensions of the given totality underdetermined and open for ongoing interpretations and negotiations. Philosopher of science, Helen Verran, has likewise demonstrated how the cultural preference among the Yoruba in Nigeria for a logic of parts/wholes makes mathematics there culturally relational rather than a universal matter (Verran 2001), something which I also recognise in my own present fieldwork materials from Ghana. Similarly, for this thesis' overarching ambition of analysing the significance of cocoa through the many boundaries set around it, the encounters between two such differently founded concepts of space are highly relevant, since they point to a growing tension over time between an increasing European preference for entities defined categorically and unambiguously through numerical specificity and encompassing spatial boundary lines in opposition to an ongoing West African emphasis on entities that emanate dynamically outward in space from central conceptual points (the latter which could be spatially founded, such as the Asante capital of Kumasi or conversely all conceptually based such as 'these are my ancestral lands') and remain enumerable first and foremost as relative parts/wholes.

Returning here again to Klaeger's use of Lefebvre's 'rhythmanalysis' term, I will add how this concept may also enable other insights on the spatial enactments of the surroundings among contemporary age working people along this Accra-Kumasi route. To the roadside hawkers the rhythms of their working days were characterised by the changing intensities of the passing traffic, while they limited their own pedestrian movements to going back and forth along a limited section of road in front of their hometown. In comparison, the truckers I travelled with had not long ago experienced a long period of downtime while parked outside a rural cocoa depot, but were now engaged in their own 'rush' period that demanded near constant activity and attention. Upon arrival in Tema the team expected that another period of downtime would face them; first while waiting in line outside a warehouse to offload the cargo, and then another still unknown period of time as they would wait for their boss' next haulage contract to be approved. For the travelling cocoa truckers I went with, as for the roadside hawkers described through Klaeger's text, their changing repertoires of temporal rhythms took place within largely fixed geographical spaces. The hawkers would not venture too far away in either direction from their hometown, since their prospective customers would pass by this place anyway, and they only needed to walk or jog alongside each vehicle long enough for a quick exchange of money and goods to take place. In other words, their experiences of 'rush' and 'relax' played out all within a certain radius of the town of Ofankor, which remained their fixed reference point. The truckers, meanwhile, experienced their work livelihood largely as recurrent movement

between two points of reference, which were the frontier town of Bonsu Nkwanta and the port city of Tema, with often prolonged periods of inactivity in either place. Lefebvre has also made a mark of such notions of boundedness that seem integral for senses of rhythm to develop: “Rhythms always need a reference; the initial moment persists through other perceived givens (Lefebvre 2014 [1992]: 46). Such necessary reference points, as I read Lefebvre’s essay, could appear as both temporal and spatial markers, say a melodic rhythm played out in time while bound as written keys on paper, or equally as a daily job routine expressed through hours of activity that includes recurrent movement of the individual person between a place of home and a place of work. In such a perspective, the concept of a commodity chain might appear as the abstracted conglomeration of numerous individual rhythms of activities, each bounded in time and space. Whereas the monetary value associated with a commercial good transported through a commodity chain is pre-set to increase only at each specific turnover point as it crosses the boundaries between chain-links, in the socially enacted spaces a different boundary dynamic takes place, which I will attempt to exemplify in the following.

At one point Muhammed pulled our truck over along a rural roadside so that Ali could make a few tyre pressure checks. Meanwhile the rest of us took the opportunity to stretch our legs and backs outside by the truck. As we stood there three young barefooted guys dressed in dirty ragged clothes stepped out from the cover of the foliage flanking the road. Holding up fresh coconuts in their hands they asked us whether we were interested in buying some. At an initial offering price of merely one Cedi a piece none of my truck companions saw any reason for further bargaining before immediately agreeing to the deal, buying four coconuts on the spot so that there would be one for each of us. The swift transaction seemed to please everyone, and the three young guys soon after retreated with smiles and waving arms back into the roadside bushes, four Cedis richer, while my fellow travellers with equally big smiles lifted their opened coconuts up to share in an impromptu toast of coconut water. As a long-time foreign visitor to Ghana the differences in monetary incomes and purchasing prices was usually no longer something that caught my attention. The absolute majority of people here earned significantly less money than did most people in, say, Europe or North America, but prices of everyday necessities were of course also (somewhat) comparatively lower. What however stuck with me from this short random encounter by the roadside was the profound cheerfulness that all six Ghanaians in front of me had expressed, even though the total transaction sum – four coconuts for four Ghana Cedis – was quite minuscule even by Ghanaian standards. As any researcher from the economics field would be able to attest to, I am sure, is that this interaction could be said to represent a boringly basic

example of the forces of supply and demand. Something that a curiously minded anthropologist might still linger on, though, was the mutual expressions of happiness that resulted on both sides of the exchange. Lefebvre's concept of rhythms could add some nuance to this scenery, considering how either party to the exchange evidently met with somewhat dissimilar reference points in mind. The work of the trucking team entailed movement between the rural frontier areas and the country's primary port city, and so the reference points for the rhythms of their work lives enabled them to have insights into common coconut prices across the ranges of this space. Evidently, what the young roadside guys deemed to be the fair price for coconuts referred not to the higher town or city prices that the truckers were used to, but were in all likelihood based on their own more limited movements by foot around these farmlands, or in other words, another daily rhythm based on differently oriented reference points. All of this can of course still be brushed off as very basic stuff from an economic perspective, but the crucial point which I seek to elucidate here, and which I will continue to explore in the following, is the seemingly intrinsic way in which notions of space intermingle with notions of value.



Image 8: In the centre of the image a 'Call to Glory' poster announces the death of a local woman at the age of 103 years. On either side stand signboards pointing towards two different Christian church congregations situated nearby. Roadside at the town of Sefwi Asafo, Western Region, October 2014.

Hard and Soft Numbers

From inside the cab of a slow moving cocoa truck there was usually ample time to take in the scenery along the route. In many places signboards and billboards had been put up alongside the roads to advertise local businesses, religious congregations, or to announce particular social events. One common use of numbers in this public sphere of especially rural southwest Ghana was on the printed funerary posters and commemorative billboards placed prominently by the roadsides in or near the communities of the deceased. Typically for such billboards would be the showing of photos of the departed family member in question with the indication of their names and notes of the age at which they had passed on. Frequently, though, such signs would include very high claims of the dead person's age, such as for instance 105, 120, or even older (the oldest example I put into my fieldnotes was an *ɔpanyin*²⁶ of the town of Bibiani who was announced to have had passed away in 2013 after living to the impressive full age of 150 years). According to medical anthropologist Sjaak van der Geest, the age of old people in Ghana is frequently exaggerated to add to their honour and prestige (van der Geest 2006: 494), and as such numerical age indications of especially elderly people should not be presumed to always correspond to objective records of time. I find that this praxis of inflating numbers of years of age with estimations of social affectation and recognition points to a peculiar conflation of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of value²⁷. A human lifetime in Ghana might be as long as a human lifetime anywhere else in the world, yet if expressed in numbers it might easily be even more.

I had also noticed how another way in which numerical use across Ghana could be seen to differ had to do with what in economic terms might be called "price memory". In 2007 Ghana had carried out a revaluation of its currency, as the old Cedi had gradually become inflated to a point where the bank notes and coins carried an impractically large number of zeroes, and where purchases of expensive consumer items, such as vehicles or landed property required the handing over of several sports bag sized volumes of bundled cash notes, just as maximal ATM withdrawals were practically limited by the amounts of money notes that could physically fit through the dispenser of the machines

²⁶ *ɔpanyin* is an Akan honorary title for elders who were considered wise and had lived a very respectable life. The precise spelling of this, as of many other Akan terms, tends to differ across the South Ghanaian regions.

²⁷ As a further note, Boni (2010) likewise details the crucial importance of social reputation for matters of numerical value calculations in regards to donations offered by family and kin at Sefwi-Akan funerals. De Witte has also presented an analysis of the quite complex social considerations involved in the budgeting of Asante funerary expenses including the anticipated monetary donations from mourners of the deceased (de Witte 2003).

at once, rather than the daily withdrawal limits set by banks or credit card companies. The National Bank of Ghana had chosen to solve this problem by officially slashing four zeroes from the old denominations and by replacing old notes and coins with new ones. This change, of course, resulted in profound confusion for some time, as people habitually spoke of prices in the old terms, even as the transactions would take place with the new Cedis. As I spent in total about one year in Ghana between 2007 and 2009, I recall witnessing many encounters among Ghanaians and visiting foreigners, as well as even among Ghanaians themselves, where one party to a shopping transaction would express initial shock at hearing the price quoted to them, e.g. “What, ten thousand!?! – But a tea bread should only cost one Cedi!”

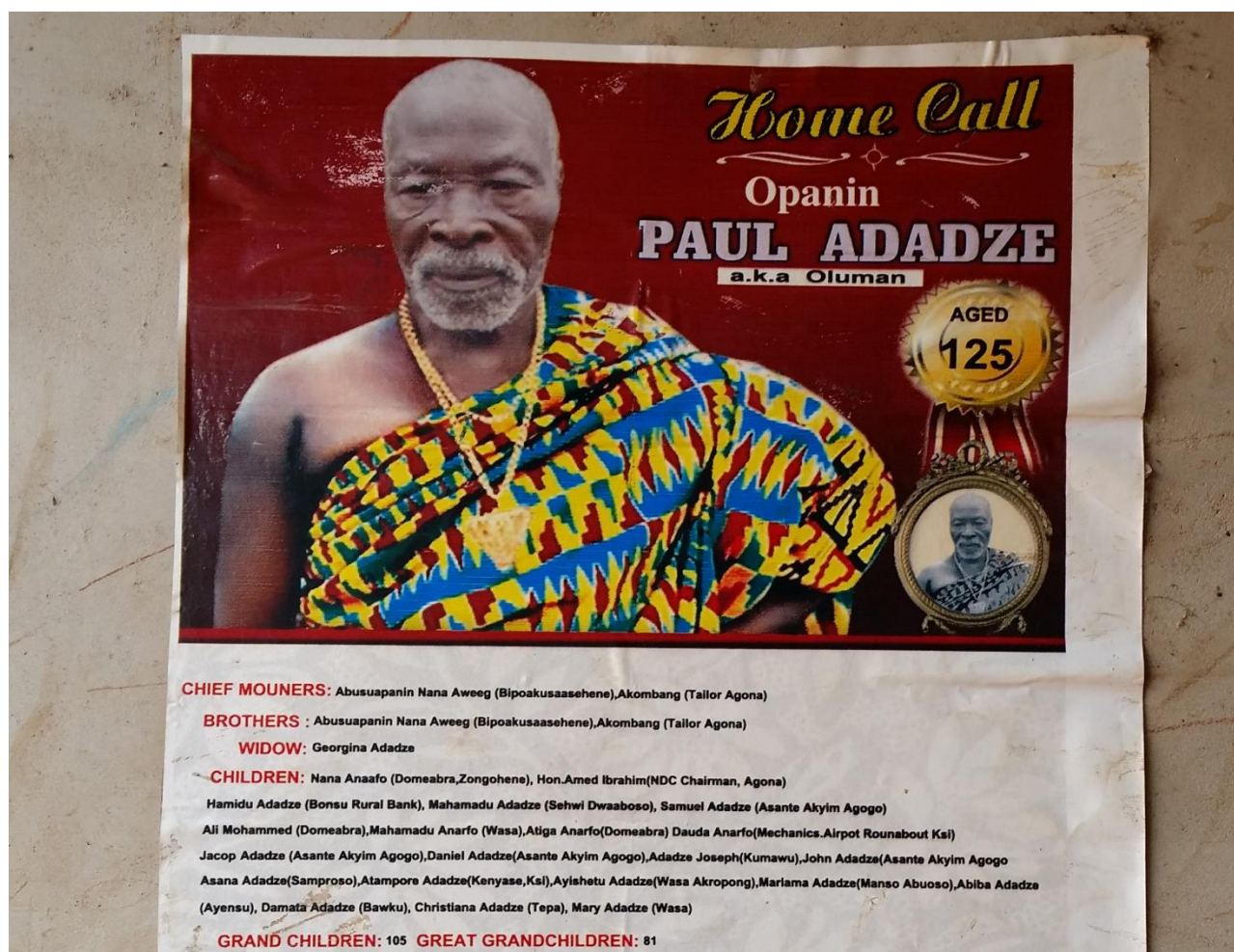


Image 9: A funeral announcement poster pasted onto the outer wall of a private household in the town of Bonsu Nkwanta. Of particular note the age of the deceased opanin is listed as 125 years. September 2015.

I still occasionally heard such references to the old currency terms during my later 2014-15 fieldworks, even as price indications according to the new Cedi denominations had finally become

standard everyday use. For instance, one day in 2014 I asked to purchase a small plastic satchel bag of pure water from a very young boy who sold a bowl full of these by the roadside in the rural town of Bonsu Nkwanta. To my surprise the boy asked me to pay him a “thousand” for the satchel, when what it turned out that he in fact expected to receive was a 10 Pesewa coin (that is, 0.10 GH¢). As this boy had surely not even been born back in 2007 when the old currency was removed from circulation, I imagine that his choice of word was likely one he had learned from his older family members or from other adults at the town market place. Arithmetically it made little sense to me how someone would find it preferable to quote and calculate prices in terms of numbers four figures higher than the amounts they really expected to see transacted, so instead I wonder if this linkage was more of a qualitative nature. As it had once been the established norm in Bonsu Nkwanta (and across many other parts of Ghana) that the fair price for a small satchel bag of purified water was 1.000 (old GH¢), then the verbal or written combination of these two particular entities (1.000 GH¢ and 1 pure water satchel) might in this context indicate that the correct proportions between the price number and the commercial item was being respected and therefore that the seller’s offer was given in earnest. Even as the official currency was revaluated, I believe that continued reference to the old currency price could therefore both present a matter of recalcitrant habit (from those old enough to have formed such) as well as a normative expression of sincerity from either participant in the new transaction. Furthermore, I suggest that price memory could represent another cause for this persistent association between a specific yet obsolete numerical price indication and a particular volume of a good. In this way, especially the prices of common locally produced and consumed staple goods would tend to remain more resilient to price increases caused by value inflation of the currency than would imported products. Since a very specific nominal price was already firmly associated with an equally specific volume of a particular good, both the sellers and the buyers could then continue reproducing the already established verbal price point between them, even as other products increased in price relative to these local staples.

At this point a further comparison can be made to the Ghanaian fixed prices on domestic standard sized cocoa bags. The governmentally decreed farm gate purchasing price of cocoa has remained unchanged at 212 GH¢ per 64kg bag between October 12th 2012 and October 3rd 2014²⁸. Over the course of the same approximately two years the currency inflation rates in Ghana have averaged slightly above 16% per year²⁹. Since the world market transactions of cocoa are settled in US

²⁸ Ghana Ministry of Finance (2012, 2014).

²⁹ Ghana Statistical Service (2015).

Dollars while Ghana pays its domestic cocoa producers in GH¢, this means that for the Ghanaian government authorities mere continuation of the same purchasing price over the course of this period has become increasingly profitable on its own. What to a Ghanaian smallholder cocoa farmer looks like a condition of stability (one bag of cocoa is still worth 212 GH¢, just like it has been for the past two years), is from the point of view of Ghana's Ministry of Finance (under which the entire COCOBOD organisation is a subsidiary) and the country's political elite a condition of remarkable year-over-year growth of profitability. Both cocoa farmers and domestic LBC purchasers on the other hand have the effective value generation from their mutual business efforts eroded, as the purchasing power from their cocoa sales are gradually reduced relative to other, especially non-local goods. While nominal price value of the good has remained the same, the exchange value of the same good has shifted. In other words, maintenance of one sort of fixed boundary in the form of a specific farm gate purchasing price takes place concurrently with expansionary processes of the economic value of the cocoa once it becomes possessed by the Ghanaian state authorities³⁰. The field of economics, of course, has pursued all such dynamics to a much higher level of analytical sophistication than what is possible to explore in this context, but I wish to emphasize at this point how the case described here already indicates the dual tension at stake in value theorization. Value can be understood as something generated through a transaction, just as value can be understood as an essential quality of a good.

I have wondered how to analyse the valuations of cocoa in Ghana anthropologically, both considering the many ways in which this natural good was described to me and engaged with by many people there, and furthermore considering the situational tendency towards conflation of qualitative and quantitative expressions of value in the common usage of numbers among members of the population. As I have observed in the Ghanaian transport sector as well as in the border village of Topman and the surrounding areas cocoa is continuously being reconstituted through a number of different activities, of which only some become expressed in numerical forms. At the same time people describe cocoa as most of all a cash crop, a means to obtain other ends rather than an end in itself, and once sold and out of physical sight it loses all relevance to them. In the government logistics office of the port city of Tema, cocoa is visualized as an abstract unidirectional flow through the solidly outlined links of a commodity chain, while the material cocoa is kept out of sight and appears instead through

³⁰ As a note, Adebayo (2007) discusses parallels in local currency monetary inflation and devaluation processes between Ghana and Nigeria from the 1970s and onward. Adebayo finds that a number of his study informants reported their experiences of a "shrinking" of the middle class, whereby some managed to keep up with the relative income levels of the nations' elites (steadied by access to international currencies), whereas others found themselves drifting into poverty (ibid: 103).

numerical abstractions. On the cocoa truck through Ghana the cocoa stands as immanently close – yet hidden from direct view – and is instead most vividly present as weight, mass, and smell. Although engagements with cocoa in all of these settings revolve around issues of money-making and the idea of cocoa as purely a cash crop, it is clearly also entangled in many other conceptualisations of life, personhood, nationality, social norms, and more. The question I am most curious about is how one might understand the value of cocoa in this fieldwork setting in concurrently a cultural as well as economical sense of the word?³¹ An important aspect is that, although the ways that cocoa is being valued in Ghana seem largely disconnected from the use value it is primarily associated with among consumers of chocolate elsewhere, its significance for the livelihoods of a major part of the Ghanaian population goes beyond what could be termed only a matter of exchange value. I have already briefly considered how Lefebvre's concepts of rhythms and socially enacted spaces can be applied to show a linkage between people's perceptions of space and their perceptions of value. In order to further develop this line of enquiry I will now seek to expand it through a discussion of other anthropological approaches to value and spatiality.

Value Theory between Society and Individuals, Units and Relations

There may not be one all-encompassing anthropological theory of value to be found in the humanities and social sciences, if one is to believe anthropologist David Graeber (2001), despite his own attempts at establishing a basis for the same. There may also never be such a theory, if one is to believe one of the arguments upheld among the editors of a special issue on 'value' in the ethnographic journal HAU (Otto & Willerslev 2013). Regardless, the present conditions have not been for a lack of trying. Depending on how widely one casts the net there have been numerous attempts at explaining why some people tend to find it more worthwhile to do one thing rather than another or hold something in higher esteem than another, both interpretable as expressions of value. Graeber, again, starts his own (2001) exploration of the topic by listing three overall ways, in which he finds that

³¹ Here, of course, one might also consider the assertion by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins that the field of economics should be considered a subfield of the cultural studies of the humanities (Sahlins 2013: 161-62). What I am trying to get at here is the identification of an analytical approach to cocoa that can concurrently acknowledge the widespread numerical circumscription of this natural good, while still remaining capable of exploring the deeply a-numerical forms of significance that the same cocoa also holds according to the people interacting with it.

scholars have tended to talk about value. First there is plural ‘values’ in the sociological sense that deals with ideas of what is considered proper and desirable in order for people to live a good life. Then there is ‘value’ in the economic sense of the word, as expression of the desirability of something over another and thereby as a representation of the resources one would need to give up in order to obtain such. Finally, Graeber also points to the way that ‘value’ has been used in the linguistic sense, especially in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, who saw value as an expression of ‘meaningful difference’ (de Saussure 1959 [1916]). De Saussure posited that each word becomes meaningful only in contrast to other words in the same language, and thus the value of any single word is relative as it consists of the ‘meaningful difference’ between it and others.

Harkening back to terms originating in the influential (1944) work by economist Karl Polanyi, several mid-twentieth century anthropologists’ efforts to explore notions of ‘value’ have tended to become split into two camps of ‘substantivists’ on the one side and ‘formalists’ on the other. Substantivists started from a concept of a given society and from there sought to identify and classify various social principles and components that guided the actions of its individual members. Formalists, meanwhile, based their explorations on the motivations and behaviours of individual society members and from there sought to identify how such added up to a social whole. Despite some attempts to bridge this principled divide (for instance Barth’s Transactionalism, which I’ll return to shortly), the rather entrenched debate between substantivists and formalists faded from the academic foreground in the late 1960s and early 70s, as first Lévi-Strauss’ Structuralism and soon also the revived scholarly interest in Marxism, along with new perspectives of Feminism, Post-Colonial studies, Practice Theory, World Systems Theory, Symbolic anthropology, etc. came to the fore of the academic world (Barnard & Spencer 2002 [1996]; Ortner 1984). According to Graeber (2001: 12), though, the old divisions of the formalist//substantivist academic camps had still not really been resolved and at the time of Graeber’s writing he considered these to still linger on in subsumed forms through later academic theorizations since the early 1970s. In Graeber’s view, this meant that especially the formalist emphasis on individual agency, and particularly assumptions of self-interested motivations had shaped the arguments of influential later scholars, including notably Pierre Bourdieu and Arjun Appadurai (ibid: 27-33).

Another aspect that runs through much of the value theory literature is the question of the degrees to which value should be deemed as something that is essential; that is, contained in goods or objects, or entirely relational; that is, only identifiable as valuable to someone or something else. The recurrent oscillations between emphasis on individual agency, social structure, objects, and actions have over time resulted in quite different theorizations of the term of value across the humanities and social

sciences. Before attempting to engage further with the question of value in relation to Ghanaian cocoa, I will therefore first devote a few more pages to consider the merits of some of the significant existing contributions to the field.

Value as Essence and Exchange

The imagery invoked by the chain metaphor, whether coupled with terms of ‘commodity’, ‘value’, or ‘supply’ is one that lends itself easily to views of value as increasing progressively as a commodified good is moved from a site of origin to a site of consumption. The linear accumulation of value is in this perspective inseparable from the essence of the commodity itself, something which corresponds well with the analytical approach of Arjun Appadurai, who argues that “Economic exchange creates value. Value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged.” (Appadurai 1986: 3). The two core premises of Appadurai’s approach to value both appear explicitly through this quote. First, Appadurai follows in the tradition of Georg Simmel’s (1978 [1907]) conceptualization of money that sees value as something that arises solely through acts of exchange. Secondly, though, Appadurai goes on to take the idea of that emergent exchange value and immediately ‘embody’ it as some kind of stored essence within the very commodity that is exchanged. The effect is that as a commodified good successively changes hands, increasing value accumulates within it, almost like a battery would storage the electricity transferred to it. The end point, the moment of discharge, of course, follows when the commodity is eventually consumed, upon encountering a person who deems its use value higher than its continued exchange value. Appadurai’s approach aligns very well with the commodity chain thinking that likewise operates with a concept of gradual value increases of commodities where each linking handover moment – exchange – increases the value of the good in question. While on some level a Marxist legacy was still evident through Hopkins & Wallerstein’s reliance on the terms of ‘labour’ and ‘production processes’ in their initial 1986 formulation of commodity chains, their concept of the structured separate-yet-linked entities also expresses stepwise value increases through acts of exchange – the links of the chain – that align their concept closely with both Simmel and Appadurai.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu likewise deserves mentioning here as another impactful social scientist whose theorizations align fairly well with ideas of value as such have becomes expressed through the commodity chain concept and more generally through the presumed self-centred interests

as the driving motivation of individual actors, not least as imagined throughout neoliberal economics. A central thought in Bourdieu's theorizations has been the idea that even if actors are not always rationally or even consciously calculative in their choices of action, then they should at least always be presumed to be engaged in processes of optimizing *something* for their own benefits, whether that something is explainable in forms of economic or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990: 11, 60-61). Thus, Bourdieu's explanations of social change appear to rest soundly on a rather economistic assumption of individual agency that is always geared towards personal gain in the form of 'capital' (whether economic or symbolic), or in other ways aiming towards competition and getting ahead of others (hence perhaps his numerous references to sports and gaming³²). This idea of social science on economic terms seems further evident in the comparisons and arguments Bourdieu presents in his essay on "The Interest of the Sociologist", where by the end of it, the major difference between symbolic and economic capital appears, through Bourdieu's analysis, to be little more than the instability of the former's value (ibid: 93). Somewhat clarifying in this regard are Bourdieu's comments on his sources of inspiration behind the development of his theoretical approach, in particular his ambition of escaping the Structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss (ibid: 9, 62) by way of a practice-oriented approach, for which Bourdieu found resonance in the works of Max Weber (ibid: 76). The result of this could perhaps be interpreted, as Graeber elsewhere argues (2001: 27-29), as a social theory presenting substantivist explanations by way of formalist arguments; or stated differently, that Bourdieu's alternative to the notions of social structures takes its basis in terms originating closer to the field of economics, in particular through his deliberate coupling of the individual actor with the term of 'capital'.

The linkages between capital and value have perhaps most famously been explored by Karl Marx, whose 19th Century socio-political writings and criticisms have become foundationally influential for later generations of social-scientific theorists. The Marxist tradition holds that value constitutes the creative work efforts that people put into the products they make – a value which in turn, however, is all too often subsequently removed from the workers by the owners of the applied means of production, owners who then only pass some of this value back to those who produced it. The value of a product seen as the creative output of the worker is then typically forgotten once it is sold and translated into monetary value terms, an act of disconnection and essentializing which Marx denounced as 'fetishism' (Marx 1990 [1867]: 165).

³² For instance, in the previously quoted career retrospective work by Bourdieu I took notice of his tendency to explain the soundness of his prior theorizations through competitive gaming and sports metaphors, as seen on the following pages: (Bourdieu 1990: 9, 11, 60-61, 63, 73, 76, 78, 80-81, 89).

Here, it appears to me that the classical Marxist way of looking at value as corresponding to the amount of energy individuals put into their work, in the case of Ghanaian cocoa production would lead to a particular conclusion, given how the government there dictates all official buying prices. No matter how much or how little work the farmers put into working their farm, nor how arduous a journey turns out for the truckers, their monetary compensation is almost solely dictated by the weight of their produce or cargo. Likewise, the licenced buying companies and their purchasing clerks only seem to have limited wiggle room, as all official buying prices are fixed at the state level and their commissions and bonuses are therefore very tight too. Across the range of domestic primary producers, merchants, and workers, I heard people very consistently complain that they each received too little, yet lack of alternative income options seemed to keep them at it. Thus, for the classical Marxist image of the exploitative capitalist factory owner to make sense in the contemporary cocoa business of Ghana, it would seem that the role of that actor would need to be assigned to the state itself, since its export monopoly makes the government the de-facto owner of all the cocoa products as well as the ultimate employer of the workers producing them.

Still, a Marxist analysis holds far greater potential than this one particular comparison. Anthropologist and geographer Neil Smith has attempted to develop Marx' theoretical insights on value beyond its original context amid the heyday of 19th Century European industrialization and social upheavals (Smith 2008 [1984], 2007, 1996). Centrally, Smith identifies the formalized creation of conceptual and geographical spaces as the defining characteristic of value creation in late stage capitalism. Since Marx wrote of value as the outcome of labour processes, and since such value according to Marx could subsequently become detached and extracted from the contexts of its production, then to Smith it follows that the creation of more production contexts allows for more opportunities for capitalist value extraction and accumulation. In other words, Smith argues that a ceaseless proliferation of human-made spatial and conceptual categories, each with limitless potential for sub-spatial divisions, has become a central feature of late stage capitalism's relentless hunt for profit (Smith 2008 [1984]). The concept of 'Nature' itself serves as one such major category, and goods of Nature (whether organic or not) can become valuable through extraction and insertion into human society - itself another overall category. Smith's identification of a close interdependency between creation of spaces and creation of value resonates very well with the concept of commodity chains, ownership of plots of farmland, national boundaries, etc., and I shall return to discuss his insights at certain points over the course of the present and the following chapters. Still, I have one particular caveat about Smith's theory, and this concerns his focus on the hegemonic ways in which late stage capitalism brings about ever more fine grained geographical spaces, from which valuable resources can

be extracted. Through Smith's writing (ibid.) such spaces appear largely solid, fixed, and effectively undisputed once past their initial moment of creation, almost like the way European colonial powers may once have negotiated among each other and drawn geometric lines across a map of the entire African continent³³. Rarely, in the Ghanaian and Ivoirian ethnographic materials that form the basis of my own work, have I encountered spatial categorizations that appeared absolutely fixed and uncontested. Rather, as I have already discussed in connection with the Ghanaian cocoa transport industry, notions of value and spatiality appear much more relative, multiple, and overlapping, once livelihoods and agency of individual people are also taken into accounts. I have already touched upon the potential of Lefebvre's works for an understanding of such heterogeneous spaces and value creation, but several other theorists have likewise contributed with important insights that treat spatial perceptions and value creation as relational and contingent matters rather than essential and absolute. I will for this reason now proceed to discuss the attempts of others to build on particularly the Maussean tradition of value which emphasizes value exchanges as ongoing relations instead of detachable moments of transaction.

Relational Values

Graeber draws in part upon the Saussurean approach to value in his (2001) attempt to develop a theory of value that can encompass both the economic and the social applications of the term. Value, in de Saussure's linguistic formulation, appears basically as a negatively charged aspect of comparison; that what something (i.e. a word) *is*, is defined by what it is not; it is the difference that remains after comparison has taken place (for instance, the value of the colour 'red' depends on the number of other colour words in the same language that this word is compared to; if only yellow and blue, then 'redness' is permitted a larger potential range of meaning than if it, say, had also been compared to colours of auburn or brown, or any other larger array of colour words).³⁴

By including a number of additional sources, including Marilyn Strathern's developments of Marcel Mauss' relational approach to value, as well as a founding influence in Karl Marx's writings on the topic, Graeber seeks to follow up on the alternative view of value as something that concerns ongoing relations (between people as well as other entities in their surroundings) rather than

³³ More on this in the following chapter of this thesis.

³⁴ For other examples, see for instance de Saussure (1959 [1916]: 114-120).

disconnecting moments of exchange. A central point of Marcel Mauss' (2001 [1925]) work on gifts and gift-giving is that the 'spirit of the gift', the social obligation of a gift receiver to present a counter gift, shows how objects should not be treated as fully detachable from their owners, but rather that gift-giving acts extend parts of the giver into relations with the receiver and the wider society. In this regard Mauss followed the prior insights of Emile Durkheim, who had demonstrated the inherent non-contractual elements in contracts, i.e. the morals, customs, and history that make monetary transactions matters of much more than strictly technical processes regulated by law (Durkheim 1960 [1893]). Mauss, like Durkheim and Marx before him, points to a concept of *value* as an expression of the activities and relationships that take place between people and their material surroundings, but Mauss' material does not support the view of Marx that the value of an object can subsequently become alienated to a point where it appears as fully severed from the relations of its production and with an essentialized (or, fetishized) value of its own. As anthropologist Christopher Gregory has suggested (1982), a key difference between gift economies (the topic of Mauss' work) and industrialized capitalist societies (the topic of Marx' works) is that whereas the former tend to emphasize qualitatively expressed exchanges of objects as ways to increase social relations among people, the latter tend to emphasize quantitatively expressed exchanges of objects as ways to increase individual accumulation. This oppositional presentation constitutes a significant simplification, of course, but I believe that it also highlights some of the multiplicities that prevent a simple exploration of questions pertaining to the value of cocoa in a setting like that of contemporary Ghana. As a country shaped on a background of both European colonial era influences³⁵ coupled with indigenous West African cultural traditions, there are certain interactions observable in the current cocoa production, which hearken back to legacies of either and which conjoin to a particular mixing of value notions in the present. All of this will be the topics of the following chapters.

At the current juncture I would like to emphasize the point how, in my understanding, the crux of contention between the works of the multiple value theorists presented so far in this chapter concerns the issue of whether value ought to be approached as a practically essential quality of any given entity, or instead whether value ought to be treated as a dynamic process between multiple entities, and hence a temporal relation. Secondly follows another strong contention between several of these theorists whether the emergence of value recognized among any population of people ought to

³⁵ And, of course, post-colonial foreign political, cultural, and economic influences as well, whether such are attributable to "The West" understood primarily as Europe and North America, or, increasingly over the recent decades also to parts of Asia – primarily through Chinese business investments.

be analysed foremost as the outcome of individual or social agency. Is the value of cocoa embedded in the good itself or is the value only an expression of the processes of its transaction? Where does one locate the value of a good inside a commodity chain? – Does the monetary value of a bag of cocoa correspond to its nominal price tag whilst it is moved through each single commodity chain link, for instance on a truck or inside an LBC warehouse? Or does the monetary value only emerge at the contact points between two commodity chain links, for instance as a bag leaves the farm gate, or right as the coastal depot workers offload the cocoa truck while their manager signs the waybill presented by the driver? And what of the qualitative processes that enable such quantitatively expressed value increases? Is it the convenient presence of cocoa near the African container port that makes such 320GH¢ cocoa bags more valuable than otherwise identical 212GH¢ cocoa bags inland? Or, rather, is it the temporary relation between truckers and cocoa and the productive work effort to move both to the port that generates the value increase? In other words, should value be treated as a spatially embedded quality or as a quality of movement from one space to another? Principally, is the value of a good best defined statically by its boundaries in relation to other presently surrounding spaces, or is it preferable to approach the value of a good as the dynamic changes of its boundaries towards other spaces?

What I aim to suggest here is that something all of the abovementioned value theorists share in common, albeit quite implicitly, and despite often profound disagreements regarding other aspects, is a general conviction that to the human mind notions of value are easily associable with spatial dimensions. There is perhaps only little novel in such a thought, and it could be argued that any perception of value as something that is potentially describable as essences, e.g. in the form of commercial goods or heirlooms, already proceeds from a conceptual premise of spatially bounded objects of certain dimensions. Even thoroughly process based approaches to value, such as those following the Marxist tradition, call attention to the thought that value to people may easily appear as three-dimensional and tangibly enclosed in material goods, although such perceived qualities in this tradition would however be deemed false and a fetish. Stated differently, an expression of ephemeral spatiality could appear to emerge through approaches such as those by Marx and by Mauss that locate value first and foremost in the interplay between people and objects, even as these, unlike later approaches such as those of Appadurai, Bourdieu, or Smith, seek less to re-situate the value inside neither absolute geographical spaces, nor the commodity objects themselves, nor into individualized capital forms. As already indicated through my prior mentioning of Lefebvre's approach to rhythms earlier in this chapter, I find it analytically promising to treat value as an inherently dynamic expression of spatiality. I have therefore in the following tried to outline an analytical approach that I have termed

‘spatialized value’. This approach, I contend, is more suitable for an analysis of value generation across the contemporary Ghanaian cocoa business, given how actors of this business conduct their activities through a multitude of space and value reckoning influences from both West Africa and afar.

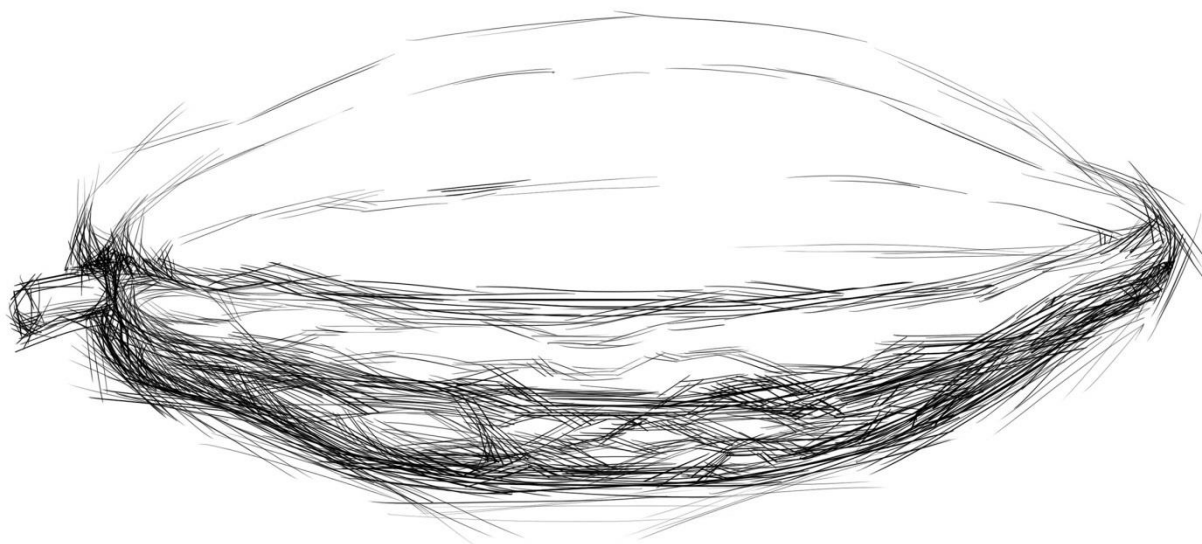
Spatialized Value – Theorizing an Approach to Boundaries and Value Generation

In my fieldwork context, both space and value are concepts that frequently become expressed as emergent and dynamic, while numbers in turn may refer to a logic of parts/wholes rather than universal mathematical units of measurement, and numbers may even at times serve as expressions of entirely qualitative norms and considerations of interpersonal sociality. Consequently, a strictly quantitative value analysis of the Ghanaian cocoa business becomes severely hampered by both the difficulty of obtaining exact numbers and figures, as well as further challenged by the unreliability and contestable nature of many number indications once such are obtained.

I suggest instead that both notions of *value* and *space* can be gainfully analysed as continuous dynamic co-performances of *meaningful difference*, and that such a combined perspective enables important insights into value generation all across the contemporary Ghanaian cocoa business.

The starting point for this ‘*spatialized value*’ approach, as I have termed it, is the idea that to understand value necessitates first an identification of significant boundaries that enable something to stand out. What boundaries produce, in the most general term, are expressions of meaningful difference, designations of something as different from something else. My argument goes that through *difference*, (at the most basic between what could be termed inside//outside, self//other, here//there, this//that, before//after, etc.) emerge concurrent notions of value and space. In other words, an implicit spatiality extending outward from any boundary-making moment into a fuzzily dimensioned, ambiguously delimited space, inherently value-charged through its difference from that which it is not – i.e. its neighbour or neighbours. For instance, the basic differentiation of a particular entity as being ‘cocoa’ separates it conceptually from all other ‘non-cocoa’ entities, in effect affording it a huge unbounded range of space for potential “cocoa-ness” given the lack of further differentiating encounters of comparison that delimit it as different from others (e.g., cocoa is the seed from a type of fruit, cocoa grows on certain trees, cocoa is something that is bought by foreign people, cocoa is made into chocolate, etc.). Each differentiating moment where cocoa brushes up against other entities

(whether or not such are materially conceptualized) actualizes boundaries of meaningful difference, and all such forms of actualization dynamically redefine what cocoa is and becomes.



For another illustration of this concept I would like to point to the intentionally rough line drawing of a cocoa pod shown here above as well as on the front cover of the present thesis. If one imagines that each single line on this drawing represents one spatio-temporal enactment of a boundary of meaningful difference between cocoa and a given non-cocoa entity, then with each additional encounter the dimensions of cocoa gets further fleshed out (or reigned in, if one prefers). Each difference-enacting encounter contributes towards increased specificity of meaning of cocoa, to the views of those actors engaging themselves with it. While each actor may even agree that the cocoa holds value, the basic point of transactional value, however, hinges upon the notion that some level of incommensurability (meaningful difference) remains between the perceptions of different actors, or else they would see little point in pursuing an exchange at all. With the increased number of boundary enactments, however, the potential ranges of remaining incommensurability decrease, thereby delimiting the potentials for ‘marginal gains’ whereby one actor may profit from the implicit differences between the spatial dimensions of their own engagements with cocoa as compared to the points of view of a transactional partner.

This formulation also aligns the idea of spatialized value with a central tenet of STS analysis that likewise approaches meaning as emerging from and remaining contingent upon encounters between entities, such as people and objects (for example as argued in Henare et al. 2007; de Laet &

Mol 2000). Efforts like these place actions at the forefront of value creation and are part of what has been described as a more recent tendency in social science to write ‘Ethnographies of Encounter’ (Faier and Rofel 2014). By emphasizing the encounter rather than entities, I see a way to effectively avoid the categorical opposition between value as something produced through individual agency as opposed to value produced by collective society. Instead neither individual nor social entities should be presumed as absolute from the onset, but rather as always emergent, contingent, ephemeral invocations of meaningful differences whose dimensions, bounds and significance are always in the midst of being permuted, reinforced, or reconfigured through encounters with that which appears different. Stated in yet other ways both concepts of individuals and social groupings are approachable as specific categories that all emerge from encounters that actualize meaningful difference, and hence produce both space and value, yet never precede either.

Once any single boundary of meaningful difference has been actualized, what lies on either side appears with a form of basic spatial dimension, prone to further honing and refinement through other subsequent boundary enacting encounters. Value, at this initial moment may be treated as both that which is contained by a boundary, and which may also in turn be moved across a boundary (or by the movement of the boundary itself, for the same outcome). From this particular viewpoint, perceptions of value as either inherent to a space or an object, or value as a transactional process, can be recast as matters of perspective and choices of emphasis – and thus not mutually exclusive at all.

Therefore, in the context of my analytical endeavours, when I focus on the value generating potential of any given cocoa related space or object, I employ one of a few synonymic terms of ‘spaces of value’, ‘spaces for value creation’, and ‘value spaces’. On the other hand, when I attempt to emphasize transactions and the relative difference in value potential between different spaces or objects, I instead employ the term of ‘spatialized value’. Both sets of terms always refer to the same notion of boundary enactments as encountered in the present cocoa fieldwork context; *spaces of value* (etc.) refer to the dimensions of places or objects enabling value creation, whereas *spatialized value* refers instead to the relative dimensions of transaction processes of value – and furthermore as my overall choice of label for this approach.

Moving on, all of this presses forth the next question of who – or what – are to be treated as the actors who evoke such meaningful differences and in turn spatialized value, and how to find them? Considering how I am at the moment still discussing the concept of spatialized value in a very general sense, I will at first try to open this question up to a grand scale: Sociologist and philosopher of science, Bruno Latour, in his Gaia-lectures (2013), suggests to approach the question of

social actors through a revisit to the ‘Gaia-theory’ first proposed in the 1970s by chemist James Lovelock and microbiologist Lynn Margulis. This theory puts forth that the world is teeming with innumerable actors, ever brushing up against each other, ever in the midst of transgressing upon or yielding to one another, ever in moments of dynamic tensions between insides and outsides. Latour states that: “This coupling of one neighbour actively manipulating its neighbours and being manipulated by all others defines waves of action that do not respect any traditional borderlines and, more importantly, that are not happening at a fixed scale. Those waves [...] are the real actors which should be followed all the way, wherever they lead, without sticking to the internal boundary of an isolated agent considered as an individual inside an environment.” (Latour 2013). Latour’s emphasis on the ‘waves of action’ as the desirable unit for analysis, I think, is largely analogous with the focus on encounters that actualize difference, since all emerge by way of meetings. Entities become entities in, and through, recurrent processes of differentiation, and, following Graeber’s (2001) arguments based on the semiotics of de Saussure (1959 [1916]), so does ‘value’ emerge as well.

While Latour’s discussion of Gaia-theory in principal ways opens up the floodgates of potential difference-enacting, value-creating entities to the practically infinite, this does not render the actual scope of any ethnographic enquiry (such as the present one into cocoa) impossibly large, since – of course – nowhere near anything would be considered equally present or relevant by anyone at any particular time³⁶. Anthropologist Fredrik Barth, I believe, emphasized as much with his (1969) proposal that anthropologists should attempt to identify limited sets of cultural values that members of a given society were tending to reproduce through their individual agency, an ambition which also reflects earlier studies of cultural values by led by anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn (1961). Still, both Barth’s and Kluckhohn’s works emerged out of predominant expectations among academics of the mid twentieth century that anthropology’s ultimate aim as a science was to uncover sets of objective, perpetually valid truths about the human condition. For this reason both of these scholars, like so many of their contemporaries, based their research on analytical terms of individuals, societies, and cultures as firmly pre-given categories rather than emergent ones.

What I find imperative for a *spatialized value* approach is to take note of which words, concepts, and actors emerge as present and significant in each particular fieldwork encounter, all

³⁶ And, one may add, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz once noted in defence of the anthropological science, “it is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something” (1973: 20).

according to the *people* involved³⁷. Each such recognised entity constitutes an expression of a value space that, following my thoughts inspired by both Latour's discussion of Gaia-theory and Graeber's use of de Saussure's linguistics, could be seen as a conceptualized entity that brushes up against, transgresses upon, yields to, overlaps, or is delimited by other entities. What cocoa is and becomes in Ghana can be seen as a spatialized expression of value (value in both a social and economic sense of the word), a spatial affordance that is continuously enabled, shaped, and delimited by all other entities that are presently acknowledged as different (i.e. "non-cocoa") by those people who engage themselves with what both they and I (the researcher) recognise as cocoa in a given setting or encounter.

In sum, I suggest that for *spatialized value* analysis the encounter should be treated as paramount: value emerges from difference, difference alone gives rise to value. No mutual understanding needs to be present for encounters that actualize difference to take place. Thus, value is relative and multifarious, overlapping while diverse. The analytical focal point is therefore to look at the emergent moments where 'difference' appears, where actors become actors; the differentiations of something from something else, and most importantly the notions of space (pre-existing as emergent) that contextualize and define what gets to become recognised as an entity.

³⁷ I emphasize 'people' here, since unlike the all-inclusive grand scope of all biological actors according to Gaia-theory, my own work is still bounded in anthropology. Still, recognising as relevant any actor or concept that my human informants designate as relevant to them, can be a daunting handful for most analytical purposes.



Image 10: A cocoa truck enters through the front gate of its destination warehouse in Tema after a two-day journey from Bonsu Nkwanta. April 2014.

Linking Up, Letting Go

The very different ways in which the – purportedly same – cocoa was described to me in the logistics office and by the truckers on the road provide an opportunity for an analysis of how the cocoa becomes meaningful and valuable through these different spatial associations. The rhythms and spatio-temporal ranges of movement that frame the work lives of the cocoa truckers shape the ways in which the cocoa comes to stand as meaningful and valuable to them. Cocoa on the road is first and foremost present as a perceived solid mass, massive weight, and with an emanating smell that only in certain ways becomes expressible in numerical forms, such as the waybill's statement that we have carried a cargo of 600 bags totalling 38.4 tonnes. While the cocoa to the truck workers emerged as continuously meaningful from the trees of the rural farmlands to the port,³⁸ the cocoa effectively left their views again once they saw portside depot boys carry the last of their transported cargo bags from

³⁸ Where, as previously described, Ali and Prince each worked on their families' farms while Muhammed spent his downtime days by the truck interacting with local cocoa depot workers, all while physically surrounded by cocoa plantations in each direction.

their arrived truck trailer into a coastal warehouse building. I propose that this range of meaning of the cocoa as it appears from the views of the truckers can be approached as an expression of such a 'space for value creation'. Likewise, in the portside logistics office the cocoa emerged with a certain spatial range of meaning through its representation in a commodity chain, the outer bounds of which appeared as the farming communities on one side and the export of the cocoa inside shipping containers and bulk carriers on the other side. This commodity chain representation on its own would come to imbue the cocoa with a certain spatialized value to the views of the logistics officials working with it, abstracted, delimited, and channelled through the modularized segments of the system.

The concept of commodity chains attempts in a way already to encompass and represent a superior overview of all horizons of engagements that are evoked by people in different commercial settings along the way from a point of origin to a point of consumption. But what the present case of the Ghanaian cocoa transport reveals is that the chain imagery's formulation of linkages based around formalized moments of transaction, where the cocoa passes from one designated actor or business entity to another, fails to acknowledge the full dimensions of meaningfulness of the good to each person engaging themselves with it. To Ali, Prince, and Muhammed – along with many other Ghanaian transport workers, their own engagements and insights spanned across multiple links of the chain – such as farm work and transport (and even so while they did not acknowledge any chain imagery views as such in their own lives). Meanwhile the consequences of other formally instated commodity chain links, such as the price increases of cocoa bags caused by the transport from countryside to port, were in most practical cases circumvented or outright ignored. Also, what I found that the commodity chain imagery far too often fails to include are the expressions of value in the form of meaningful relations that emerge along the way as people engage themselves and each other with the commercial good. Such relations are often non-numerically expressed and emerge as spaces of possibility afforded by all the other entities perceived as present at any given point.

Finally, what the commodity chain approach along with other purportedly universal systems of explanations fail to fully represent, is how this system by its own gives rise to a spatialized expression of meaning that shapes a certain value space, even as it through its own conceptualization of such space seeks to organise and represent the ways that others engage with the commercial goods in question. In particular, the commodity chain approach, once defined, treats its depiction of linked spaces as static and absolute rather than dynamic and relative. Likewise, the boundaries between commodity chain links are considered connections that facilitate the extraction of something from one spatial context and the insertion of the same into another. In such a system, boundaries which encroach

upon or overlap collaboratively defined or contested spaces, or boundaries which facilitate extractions through interactions with other entities not formally recognized as part of the chain, remain either unacknowledged or, if acknowledged, become recast as problems to be solved in order to protect the integrity of the chain as already defined. In applied settings, such as government or business administrations, it might easily make sense to try and coerce unruly actors into complying with the boundaries already insisted upon through the system (e.g., as similarly argued through the term of ‘virtualism’ (Carrier & Miller 1998)). In academic settings, I believe, however, theoretical systems must necessarily remain subservient to empiric observation.

My point with this chapter’s criticism of theoretically structured concepts such as those of ‘logic framework analyses’ and ‘supply/value/commodity chains’ has not been to attempt to discredit such approaches as merely false or insufficient, but rather to highlight some implications of the inherently perspectival insights such models are capable of offering for academic analyses. The concept of the ‘commodity chain’, for instance, serves conveniently as an applied framework for expanding the limited experiential perspectives and horizons of individual actors handling a commodity into a more general perspective by way of dividing the emergence, movement, change, and consumption of cocoa into linked units. This specific “thingification” of processes of movement and exchange, however, is only one among several possible ones, and for the present purposes I have sought to discover alternative ways to elucidate how cocoa continuously emerges and re-emerges as a both particular and recognisable – yet also continuously differently valued – entity among different people engaging it in different ways.

While the physical cocoa remained present to those involved in the trucking business, each person’s perception of taking part in a global commodity chain – let alone that person’s knowledge of the concept of a ‘commodity chain’ itself – was largely absent. Only in certain places and among certain people did the ‘-chain’ concept become evident, as it did in the logistics office of the PBC. In each setting the ways in which cocoa became described, treated, and associated with value took different forms, of which a unilinear ‘-chain’ imagery was but one. Among other people more directly handling this natural good various material characteristics of cocoa took prevalence over the notions of the cocoa as abstracted flows through links in a system. Utilizing the analytical concept of a ‘chain’ to explain these particular differences in bodily perception of, physical engagement with, and mental conceptualization of the cocoa in relation to the Ghanaian truckers appears only partially adequate to me – especially considering my other observation that ‘-chain’ imageries was already prevalently applied among certain other actors working with cocoa for a living. So, instead of arguing in favour of utilizing

a commodity chain analysis as a tool for obtaining insights into an objective relation between people and cocoa, I am attempting to go a step further by following Henare et al.'s (2007) call to approach each encounter between people and a material good as mutually constitutive. In this conceptualization there would be no room for presumptions of a universal cocoa ontology wreathed in innumerable networks of human epistemological meaning-making. Rather, and thus also in keeping with much STS scholarship, there would be no cocoa that is not also in a relation to something else. Whatever cocoa can be, it will always be so in relation to some other entity. In yet other words, every time a 'chain' view of cocoa is invoked by certain actors in certain settings, the combined meaning of cocoa and chain is also made anew.

To sum up the present case, the thousands of tonnes of cocoa that people are year after year working to produce and move through Ghana – at some times and in some places – take on the appearance of a flow of numbers through a chain-like system. At other times and places the cocoa appears instead as a heavy odorous mass. On one level the cocoa described in the transport link presentation in the portside logistics office and the cocoa on the trailer of the truck can be seen as referencing the same material thing. However, the ways in which the cocoa emerges as a valuable commercial good in each one setting is almost remarkably inverse of the other; either as an abstract flow transported through a firmly bounded systemic structure - or as a firmly bounded material structure transported through a largely abstract flow – the latter abstract in the sense of the constant uncertainty and risk that faces every future moment of a truck team's journey, as well as abstract due to the largely unknown future facing the cargo from the point of view of the truckers. In both cases I have argued that cocoa emerges as recognisable and valuable through dynamic interplays between differently balanced – yet mutually constitutive – expressions of structures and processes.

If cocoa around contemporary southern Ghana appears to people by way of certain common associations of value, then the various perceived boundaries that frame the activities of the cocoa business there will each serve to expand, delimit, and channel what this cocoa can be. An exhaustive description of all such boundaries will of course not be realistic to pursue, given the highly idiosyncratic perceptions of individuals towards the cocoa that forms their livelihoods. Instead, pre-conditional acceptance of the unavoidable partiality of any obtainable insights and the necessarily perspectival truth claims that all emerge through ethnographic fieldwork stands as exactly the reason for my ambition in this chapter to outline an approach to cocoa as 'spatialized value'. By presuming only that cocoa holds some kind of relational meaning to any number of people who engage themselves with it, and that cocoa to the researcher from the onset represents just a fuzzily bounded

conceptual space, then sort of like the way a sculptor would chisel into a block of rock, so would an enquiry into the ranges and boundaries of significance of cocoa in this way at first present a crudely outlined shape, and then later on, desirably, also more intricate nuance.

In the remaining chapters of this thesis I will therefore proceed to identify and explore some of the tendencies towards boundary expressions that significantly enable, delimit, and ultimately shape the spaces through which cocoa emerges as a valuable natural good across my main fieldwork area in the rural cocoa frontier zone of the southwestern Ghanaian borderlands toward Côte d'Ivoire.

CHAPTER 3:

BOUNDARY WORK IN A LANDSCAPE OF COCOA

In the first chapter of this thesis I explored how the borderland village of Topman has somehow become stuck in a position of a marginal community relative to various national authorities, within an area that elsewhere has been described as Ghana's "final cocoa frontier" (Knudsen & Fold 2011). The continuing perception of this geographical area by both national and regional authorities as a somewhat unruly frontier zone serves the Topman community as both a delimiting and enabling factor for purposes of creating profits from their cocoa cultivation. This means, for instance, that the lack of public services to the village are at least partially counterbalanced by largely absent government law enforcement that elsewhere more actively prevents border region residents from engaging themselves in lucrative cocoa smuggling. As I have ended the initial analysis of cocoa's significance for Topman community, my argument has been that cocoa there serves as a complex figure that is concurrently connected to people's reproduction of physical and conceptual boundaries, at the same time as cocoa is centrally connected to people's acts of transgressions across those same boundaries. Additionally, the ongoing disputed legal status of Topman and the surrounding lands and communities have pointed to another dimension where such notional boundaries and spaces overlap each other, and where cocoa can simultaneously emerge as a legal and illegal natural good.

Proceeding now from the second chapter's establishment of the analytical approach I have called 'spatialized value', the commonly recognised frontier designation represents to me one out of numerous conceptual boundary making distinctions which altogether contribute to the outline of a particular spatial range of potential meaning and value attributions that cocoa may attain among the populations of people living around Topman and many other places in the surrounding region. In effect, multiple boundaries together enable cocoa production across this area to emerge with a combined appearance of potential meaning and value, which I characterize as 'spatialized value'. These boundaries are furthermore being expressed each with various qualities of solidity, permeability, or of being overlaid atop others. The topic of the chapter at hand will now be to engage more closely with these different aspects of boundaries, which physically and conceptually serve to shape the spaces for value creation affordable to cocoa among people in this part of Ghana. What I will argue is that the contemporary experience of multiple boundaries around Topman as well as the larger Ghanaian-Ivoirian borderlands are the outcomes of multiple diverse cultural and historical legacies that in

different ways influence the present constitution of this place. Over the course of this chapter I will seek to identify a number of such conditions and discuss the significance of these for the ways in which cocoa attains value today. In order to facilitate this exploration I will first shift the attention of my ethnographic enquiry to the description of a brief encounter that happened at a Ghanaian roadside immigrations checkpoint, situated about 15 km to the north of Topman village.

The Issue of the Usual Suspects of Dichotomous Categorizations

“Is it true that white people pay different prices for cocoa as a conspiracy to keep black men fighting against each other?”

– Ghanaian officer stationed near the Ghana – Côte d’Ivoire border 2014

The question posed to me by the immigration officer had caught me quite by surprise, and my impulsive attempt to make some sort of nuanced reply undoubtedly fell short of alleviating his suspicions and convincing him that what he asked about, to the best of my knowledge, was likely more complicated than what could be summarized as a conspiracy based around notions of skin colour. This exchange of words took place one day while I was travelling with a trotro along the Ghanaian side of the border. Moments before our minibus had been stopped at an immigrations checkpoint, apparently so that I – the only white person on the bus – could exit to have my travel papers scrutinised by the authorities present. The officers meanwhile showed no interest in checking the papers of the remaining 15 or so passengers who all appeared to be locals. These were instead all left to sit with quiet impatience inside the crammed sun-baked bus, while they watched a routine passport check outside somehow digress into a full discussion between the Kwasi Oburoni³⁹ and the Ghanaian officer in charge. Mercifully for them, the officer and his colleagues soon after grew tired of my rambling exposition and handed me back my passport with a motioning gesture for all of us to continue on our way.

³⁹ Twi/Sefwi expression for ‘white person’ and in Southern Ghana a label any person with light to fair coloured skin is likely to hear applied to them. *Kwasi* means “Sunday-born” – I have been told that it is an old humorous Ghanaian presumption that all white people are born on Sundays, a weekday associated with luck. *Oburoni* in turn can be translated as: “Those that came over the horizon” and is commonly used in the Akan areas of Ghana as a collective term for foreigners.

The inquisitive words of the officer, however, still resonated through my mind as our trotro once again bumped along the Ghanaian country roads, and so I jotted his question into my notebook. The implied categories seemed very sensible, coming from what I took to be the point of view of a person whose job it was to enforce the national sovereignty at the borders of the country. “White people” purchase cocoa. Cocoa is the primary export crop of both Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana, and on either side of the tropical boundary line between the two countries “black men” – farmers of often the same ethnic origins and similar tribal affiliations, frequently even direct family relations – are utilising most of their available farmlands to cultivate it. However, farm gate purchasing prices of cocoa are most of the time significantly different between the two countries⁴⁰, and with Ghanaian prices tending to be the lowest⁴¹ the country’s government has for long prohibited exports of the crop to Côte d’Ivoire. This puts the Ghanaian immigrations and customs officials in a situation where they are obligated to prevent their fellow countrymen from seeking to gain monetary profits by moving cocoa across the border – cocoa that for all practical matters appears indistinguishable from that already grown on the other side. Frustrated farmers will continuously express antagonism towards dutiful border officials, whereas officials sympathising with would-be cocoa smugglers will on the contrary risk the ire of their superior officers as well as the larger Ghanaian public if their complicity were to be exposed.⁴² It seemed plausible to me that an impression of “black men fighting against each other” could become prevalent among border personnel in this place, leading to the obvious next question of how come cocoa beans, these otherwise innocuous looking generic products of nature, could possibly have become such a pivoting point for tension. In this perspective, I surmised, a look towards “white people” – the label commonly applied as a collective category for all foreign purchasers of West African cocoa – as the suspected culprits behind the problem did not appear all that farfetched.

The same type of general comment of “white people” as the ultimate customers and therefore presumed instigators behind all the activities related to cocoa production in this part of the world had also been hinted to me during another happenstance exchange of words that took place on another day. During a random roadside stop for urgent repairs on one of my ride-along journeys with a cocoa truck headed for the Ghanaian coast, I had walked over to chat a bit with a cocoa farmer living

⁴⁰ For further details on the reasons for these price discrepancies, please see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

⁴¹ According to comparisons between the cocoa purchasing prices of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana measured annually from 1994 to 2011 (World Bank 2011: 42).

⁴² As the repercussions from the aforementioned 2010 exposures by the Ghanaian undercover journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas had already demonstrated. See for instance The Daily Graphic 2014.

at the nearest farmhouse while the trucking team worked on fixing the problem. The farmer had been puzzled to see me exit the cocoa truck right outside his farm gate and had immediately asked me, while pointing to the trailer of the truck: “White man – is this your cocoa?” Again, an idea of a sort of skin colour or racially based divide between present black cocoa producers and absent white cocoa consumers seemed implied by these words; an idea which I subsequently learned was to be even further exacerbated by the members of the trucking team I travelled with. As these truckers later told me, they had for fun told many other people the very same thing during other stops along our way; that I, the white guy, had purchased all the many tonnes of cocoa on their truck, and that I was now personally bringing it back to my home place. Of course, these truckers knew fully well that I had in fact done no such thing, but they still found it amusing to teasingly tell others that this was the case, and besides, as they said, it was close enough to the truth anyway, since the cocoa was going to end up with my fellow white people after all. It goes to say that a white people // black people categorical divide was something that I had commonly encountered throughout years of travel around Ghana as well as at the border posts. I have found this tendency further confirmed in the works of other ethnographic researchers in Ghana, among these anthropologist Brenda Chalfin. Based on her fieldwork in 2001 Chalfin relates how customs officials at Kotoka International Airport in Accra expressed much higher levels of suspicion towards arriving non-white travellers, and consequently inspected the luggage of this type of travellers more often. This, according to Chalfin, meant that: “It was no secret that the Red and Green channels were used to enforce a divide between Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian travellers and, more generally, between Africans and non-Africans, a distinction described by Customs officers as one between ‘black’ and ‘white’.” (Chalfin 2008: 526). The Customs officers of Chalfin’s study had explained as one of their reasons for this differentiation that: “The integrity of the Ghanaian should not be relied on. Out of 10 blacks only three will tell the truth about themselves and vice versa for the white traders that we already know, we only narrow them down and the principle of selectivity comes in here.” (ibid). Evidently, Chalfin’s airport informants as well as their public servant colleagues in both the Customs and Immigration Services that I interacted with along the inland border to the west shared a mutual perception of Ghanaian travellers as particularly likely to attempt to smuggle goods past the authorities.

Smuggling activities had already for a long period of time been recorded as taking place throughout Ghana. Historian E. O. Saffu wrote how one consequence of the official boundary creation between Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana in the late nineteenth century and the establishments of different systems of authority and taxation etc. between the two colonies – and later countries – had soon led to

widespread practices of smuggling that have continued ever since (Saffu 1970: 300)⁴³. Still within living memory among people in Ghana, the Acheampong military regime that had seized power in Ghana in 1972 saw cocoa smuggling across the borders to Côte d'Ivoire and Togo as one of the major causes of the country's financial woes and in response scaled up the military border patrols and retaliated against those who engaged themselves in smuggling (Mikell 1992: 198). Nevertheless, researchers still later recount how in the 1980s smugglers in Ghana could earn as much as eight times the official rate by bringing cocoa into Côte d'Ivoire instead (Deardorff & Stolper 1990: 138; see also Boni 2005: 32-33), an ongoing issue which according to COCOBOD estimates mean that the amount of cocoa smuggled out of Ghana constitutes between 5-10% of the total officially registered annual output of the nation, a smuggled amount which is further speculated to have been even higher in the border regions during the late 1970s and early 1980s (IMF 1998: 8). At other periods in time, the smuggled cocoa flows had temporarily reversed when the fixed purchasing prices on the Ghanaian side had remained higher amid deflated world market prices, which Ivoirian cocoa producers were more directly subjected to. In such cases, as for instance reported over the 2010-11 season, an estimated 100.000 metric tonnes of cocoa were supposedly smuggled the other way from Côte d'Ivoire to Ghana (World Bank 2011: 28).

Still, the question that the concerned Ghanaian Immigration Officer had asked me went one step further than the common public framing of the smuggling issue as something that concerned individual Ghanaian or Ivoirian citizens acting in opposition to the laws of each nation and society as a whole. I have generally found that categorical assumptions of 'black people' as producers of cocoa and 'white people' as consumers remains a common understanding shared among people in many parts of Ghana. However, the fact that this question was posed to me on that day had likely been provoked in part by my sudden and unannounced appearance there at the checkpoint as an obvious foreigner (if not already obvious from my physical appearance alone then definitely confirmed by my foreign issued passport that the officer inspected). Perhaps my travels there at the remote rural checkpoint had made me appear as a sort of odd representative from that opposite side of the cocoa business, of purchasers

⁴³ It could be further added, however, that smuggling as a concept had already since at least the 19th Century been recognised and addressed by both the Asante Kingdom and the British Gold Coast Colony. The Asante had long sought to prevent people from bypassing the taxes levied on travelling merchants along the Asante great-roads, whereas, for instance, issues of weapons smuggled into the Asante region through the Keta lagoon to the East or the French controlled coastal towns around Assini to the West had posed a concern to the Gold Coast Colony military officials (Wilks 1993: 172; 1973: 48, 55, 617). Thus, smuggling has remained a pre-colonial, a colonial, as well as a post-colonial problem to the different powers in charge.

and consumers, that people in these borderlands would however not normally meet face to face.⁴⁴ More generally, perhaps, as Africanist scholar Paul Nugent comments in regard to Ghanaian officials' habitual practices of boundary enforcements along the Ghana-Togo border, "the greater the distance people have come from, the more weight is attached to their presence" (Nugent 2011: 367). Regardless of motivating factors, as willing as I had been to try to discuss the officer's succinct question with him, the matter seemed to me nowhere near as clear-cut as the black//white categorical clarity by which he had phrased his inquiry.

Muddled Colonial Cocoa Legacies

The contemporary conditions of cocoa production in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are in many ways profoundly shaped by the colonial pasts of either nation. The cocoa tree itself is originally native to the Amazon but was in colonial times spread by European explorers and colonialists across the equatorial tropics of the world (Clarence-Smith & Ruf 1996). Thus, the world's largest producers of cocoa today include countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Brazil, Peru, and Indonesia - notably all nations formerly subjugated European colonial rule. A familiar argument voiced in connection with post-colonial studies is how the former colonial structures of economic exploitation still seem to persist to this day, where raw natural goods continuously become extracted cheaply from the former colonies and are brought to the former colonizing nations, where the materials are subsequently processed into more refined – and vastly more valuable – products of consumption. Cocoa does indeed seem to follow this pattern, whereby the harvested and fermented beans are in most cases exported whole and only turned into chocolate products after their arrival at European and North American roasteries, grinders and chocolate factories (Fold 2002, 2001).

As a foreign visitor taking a stroll today through some of the various supermarkets in the Ghanaian capital of Accra or the inland metropolis of Kumasi, it is evident to me how the confectionary shelves are stocked with colourfully wrapped chocolate products carrying familiar logos of big international corporate brands such as Mars, Cadbury, Nestlé, and Hershey's. As the fine prints on the backs of such product wrappers most often reveal, these chocolates have been manufactured in facilities situated in countries abroad and imported into Ghana. A glance at the price labels on the

⁴⁴ To note, during my 2014-15 fieldworks in this region, I frequently went around for three weeks or more without seeing any other 'white people' – and when I did occasionally meet such visibly non-local people it happened only in the larger towns and not once in the rural borderlands.

shelves further add the detail to the story that these chocolates are now offered at prices either matching or exceeding the levels the same products can be found at in European or North American retail stores. Moving from the big cities of Ghana (or Côte d'Ivoire for that matter) and into the rural areas, only few types of chocolate products remain available for purchase at stores or among market traders. Among such in Ghana in 2014 and 2015 I found a single Nestlé brand by the name of 'Milo', a powdered chocolate drink manufactured in Accra (but, around that time at least, according to its labels, canned in Thailand) and heavily promoted via commercials throughout Ghana. I also found various chocolate bars of the 'Golden Tree' brand, a former Ghanaian government-owned chocolate manufacturing company in Tema that has in recent decades been partially privatized. Although the two mentioned products were both priced lower than imported chocolates, they still tend to be perceived as costly luxury goods among the people I spoke with in the rural cocoa growing regions.

Despite such international connections, I find that a noticeable characteristic of the contemporary cocoa cultivation in Ghana is that local perceptions of this agricultural sector appear largely disconnected from peoples' memories or awareness of their nation's colonial past. Ghanaian independence may have been achieved in 1957, but with a national average lifespan currently just short of 66 years (CIA 2013), only the oldest percentages of the current population still hold personal memories of the late colonial times as well as the first decade or so of their country's fledgling sovereignty. Adding to this, most Ghanaians I discussed this topic with, young as old, tended to emphasize the purportedly indigenous origin of the nation's cocoa farming enterprise. It was to many of these people a familiar tale how a native man named Tetteh Quarshie a long time ago had brought the first cocoa seeds back with him from a journey to the island of Fernando Po in the Bight of Guinea⁴⁵. He then went on to plant these seeds on his plot of land on the Akwapim Ridge some twenty kilometres north of the coastal capital of Accra⁴⁶. Over the following century or so generations of Ghanaian cocoa pioneers followed suit and spread the cultivation of the crop across the rest of the nation's tropical forest belt, spurred on by increasing demand for confectionary products outside the country.

⁴⁵ Cocoa seeds had previously been brought to this island in 1855 from São Tome, a place to which it had beforehand been brought in 1822 from Bahia in Brazil (Wood & Lass 1989 [1955]: 4). Tetteh Quarshie was credited with bringing the cocoa seeds with him to the West African mainland in 1879.

⁴⁶ Today there is a small cocoa plantation museum located on what was allegedly once part of Tetteh Quarshie's original farm plot.

Over the past few decades academic research into the driving factors of migration among cocoa farmers has been dominated by the ‘forest rent’ approach (Ruf 1995; Clarence-Smith 1995, 2000; Clarence-Smith & Ruf 1996; Woods 2004). These “basic ‘laws’ of cocoa supply”, as Ruf (1995) phrased it, hypothesizes that the prospect of high profit from the cultivation of young cocoa trees on virgin soil has been the primary motivating factor behind the steady movement of cocoa pioneer fronts over the twentieth century. As soil fertility of a cocoa cultivation area is gradually depleted, cocoa farmers are increasingly enticed to leave their current lands in favour of new land elsewhere, resulting in cycles of ‘boom and bust’ periods as cocoa frontiers gradually shift across regions. Migrant labour⁴⁷ is continuously attracted to the new frontiers due to their higher profitability, whereas the old frontiers instead fall into recession and become characterised by family labour on lower yielding long-established farms. The ‘forest rent’ approach has subsequently been criticized for placing too strong an emphasis on individual and household centred rational-economic estimations of profitability to the detriment of other significant factors including labour, state, and quality concerns (Leiter & Harding 2004), and for operating with too simplified presumptions of the forms of livelihood ambitions that motivate cocoa migrants (Knudsen & Agergaard 2015). Furthermore, in Ghana the contemporary lack of additional undeveloped forest lands suitable for cocoa, raises doubt as to the future applicability of the ‘forest rent’ approach in this nation, where rehabilitation and intensification of existing areas of cocoa cultivation now constitute the recognised primary pathway to additional output growth⁴⁸.

From the historical onset of cocoa cultivation in mainland West Africa indigenous farmers had been at the very forefront of the innovation and propagation of the crop, and especially in the final decades of the 19th century, these farmers were even ahead of the colonial system in recognising the crop’s potential. The Aburi Botanical Gardens at the Akwapim Ridge of inland Accra

⁴⁷ In Ghana seasonal migrant labour for the cocoa sector has long come from the northern parts of the country, especially the areas north of the Volta Rivers (Beals & Menezes 1970). My own limited interview notes of 2014-15 showed a stronger presence of migrants from Upper West and Upper East than from Northern Region per se. As a further note, prior to the foreign labourer expulsions from Ghana caused by the ‘Aliens Compliance Act’ of 1969, many seasonal migrant workers in the Ghanaian cocoa business had even come from other countries of the region (Amanor 2006).

⁴⁸ Rehabilitation and intensification are currently the two main focus points for future cocoa sector growth, according to the COCOBOD representatives I have spoken with in 2014-15. At CRIG (Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana) I was furthermore informed that research is currently being done into the development of more drought resistant varieties of cocoa, which in time hopefully will enable Ghanaian cocoa cultivation to expand further north into the transitional forest zone of Brong Ahafo, thus potentially opening up yet another pioneer front.

were established by the British administration of the Gold Coast colony in 1888 to introduce new crops into the colony through local growing and distribution of seeds. The colonial botanists at Aburi had been experimenting with cocoa cultivation as early as 1890, but had failed due to initially planting the seeds on an exposed hillside with no shade cover (Green & Hymer 1966: 306). Meanwhile, less than 10km away along the same Akwapim Ridge a number of indigenous farmers were already successfully growing cocoa, following the example started by Tetteh Quarshie about one decade prior⁴⁹. Furthermore, the Basel missionaries in same region had experimented with cocoa cultivation as well already since 1859, but without persistent success, and the Basel Mission's claim to the title of earliest successful cocoa cultivators in the area therefore remains debatable (see Dickson 1969: 165). Similarly to the initial failures of the European experts at the Basel Mission and at the Aburi Botanical Gardens to fully realise the suitability and potential of cocoa in the region, the later colonial attempts at organizing and optimizing the cocoa cultivation through European-style large plantations failed as well to generate profits competitive with those already made by the family-run indigenous farms (Austin 1996).

From the turn of the 20th century the steadily increasing importance of agricultural exports such as cocoa from the Gold Coast and other colonies in West Africa and elsewhere meant that the colonial governments became increasingly invested in the continued expansion and wellbeing of the business. CRIG (Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana) was established in 1937 by the British colonial administration near the village of Akim [New] Tafo in Eastern Region, some 75km inland of Accra (see Hodge 2009: 207). The place was initially chosen since a local farmer had contacted the colonial authorities with an issue of some hitherto unknown plant disease troubling his farm in this place, and the study of this disease⁵⁰ close to the environment where it was first observed was the practical reason behind this location choice. This research institution put in place early on by the British colonial government was then in 1947 made part of the CMB (Cocoa Marketing Board)⁵¹, the newly formed government institution charged with overseeing the production and exports of cocoa. The CMB was

⁴⁹ In fact at least some of this cocoa was already being exported by the time that the Aburi botanists started experimenting, since cocoa had first appeared on the Gold Coast colony export list in 1885 (Dickson 1969: 165).

⁵⁰ Later classified as 'black pod', a form of contagious fungal mould that necrotizes the infected plant tissue.

⁵¹ As a note, the CMB was between 1940-46 preceded by The West African Produce Control Board, an institution set in place by the colonial government, in response to protests and boycotts in 1937 across the Gold Coast Colony by cocoa farmers rallying against what they perceived as unreasonably low purchasing prices of cocoa.

later on in 1979 restructured and renamed COCOBOD (Cocoa Board of Ghana), the name currently in use. Since the achievement of national independence in 1957 this government agency has been fully controlled by the Ghanaian state and still holds monopolistic power over all of the country's cocoa exports⁵². Furthermore, all foreign cocoa buying companies were expelled from Ghana in 1959 when the two year old independent nation at the time nationalised the cocoa business sector (Mikell 1992: 176), a purge which consolidated the control already exercised by the CMB – the later COCOBOD – over the sector as a whole.

These factors mean that for the average Ghanaian farmer today, cocoa production remains an entirely indigenous affair. The farmer obtains his or her farmland through negotiations with other farmers as well as the traditional area chiefs, is offered assistance by Ghanaian seasonal migrant farm labourers, and sells the crops of the farm only to Ghanaian purchasers licenced by the Ghanaian national cocoa authorities, which also decide the official seasonal purchasing prices. The Ghanaian authorities then take it upon themselves to sell the farmers' cocoa on the world market. Thus – to practically all Ghanaian cocoa farmers I have interviewed, not only do they consider their craft an indigenous invention, but their experiences of success or failure rest most of all on interactions with other Ghanaians, while their perceptions of chocolate consumers elsewhere in the world remain elusive at best. Dissatisfaction with low official cocoa prices is for this reason among farmers aimed almost solely at their own authorities, who in public media and opinions are persistently being accused of unfair redistributions of public funds, if not outright corruption.

Likewise, several Ghanaian agricultural experts I spoke with in 2014 and 2015 at the CRIG institute at Akim Tafo, as well as the governmental Seedling Station at Sefwi Akurofu (part of the SPD – Seed Production Division), along with the governmental CHED (Cocoa Health and Extension Division) department of Juaboso expressed various forms of frustrations and concerns regarding the wellbeing of the Ghanaian cocoa sector, frustrations that these professionals directed at the country's farmers rather than towards international entities. The concerns of the experts were typically revolving around the ostensibly “stubborn” and “backwards” practices of many of the nation's cocoa farmers, practices that to these experts' views were detrimental to the continued development and optimisation goals of the Ghanaian cocoa sector.

⁵² As a further testament to the perennial importance of cocoa for the economy of the Ghanaian state, COCOBOD is today a government institution working under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance rather than the Ministry of Agriculture, as might otherwise have been presumed given the nature of their work.

One such problem according to these experts concerns the plantings of cocoa seedlings. All government approved cocoa seedlings promoted for planting around Southern Ghana today are genetically identical clones sprouted from hybrid seeds that have been developed by CRIG⁵³. Such seeds have been optimized for high yields and shorter initial fruiting maturity times (about 2-3 years of initial tree growth compared to the 5-7 years of some of the originally planted cocoa types (Boahene et al 1999)) and are mass-produced through artificial pollination and focused cultivation at presently 23 government-run seedling nurseries around the regions, and subsequently offered for free to farmers (Gockowski 2011: iv). In the Sefwi area one such long-serving seedling station is situated at Sefwi Akurofu, and in the Autumn of 2014 CHED representatives from Juaboso were additionally organising the establishment of new seedling nurseries at a couple of locations further west near the village of Nkwanta at the Krokosua Hills and at the nearby village of Proso. Another way of disbursing the government approved high yielding cocoa seedlings has long been to hand out fresh cocoa pods to privately run independent plant nurseries that will later sell the young seedlings to farmers for small profits. Still, many farmers I talked with in 2014-15 simply preferred to replace their old cocoa trees with seedlings sprouting naturally on their own farm plots, as these people found the promises of higher yields from the government seedlings not worth the trouble of travelling sometimes quite long distances to obtain them.

Staff members of CHED in Juaboso also explained to me how it remains difficult for them to convince farmers to plant new government promoted hybrid cocoa trees on their farms. Older farmers in general often do not see how they might live long enough to benefit from planting new trees, and sometimes their traditions, habits, and feelings of seniority experience-wise make them sceptical towards listening to the advice of younger AEOs (Agricultural Extension Officers). Likewise, sheer laziness and lack of knowledge and ambition was explained to me by CHED staff members as other typical reasons why some cocoa farmers continually choose to keep old low-productive trees in place or to just replant their old or dying trees with whatever randomly sprouted seedlings they find available on their own farms rather than investing further ahead in government promoted high yielding hybrid sorts.

Bearing these comments in mind I was later surprised to read how much the statements I had gathered from contemporary Ghanaian agricultural experts mirrored statements made by British

⁵³ The hybrid cocoa propagation effort originally started as part of the Cocoa Rehabilitation Project launched in 1971 as a collaboration between the Ghanaian government and the World Bank (Amanor 1999: 35). See also Gockowski (2011).

colonial experts almost a century earlier. In 1916-17 the Gold Coast Agriculture Department had severely criticised the practices of the colony's indigenous cocoa farmers, which the colonial experts at that time found inefficient and lazy:

"[T]he producers of cocoa in this colony and Ashanti are natives in a most elementary state of civilization whose sole aim, as yet, appears to be the attainment of a maximum amount of money with a minimum expenditure of energy, however uneconomical the system, and whose lack of foresight for the future welfare of the industry – and consequently of themselves – has not yet been compensated by adequate legislative measures..."

(Sessional Paper II of 1916-17, quoted in Green & Hymer 1966: 312).

Views by governmental representatives such as those voiced here were likely part of the presumptions that anthropologist Polly Hill responded against in her influential monograph from 1963, wherein she argued that the craftiness of the Ghanaian Akwapim Ridge farmers towards reinvesting their monetary returns from cocoa farming into the acquisition and cultivation of more cocoa farming lands elsewhere would make it far more suitable to characterize these people as rural capitalists than as primitive peasants. Hill's detailed research opposed simplistic labels of Ghanaian cocoa farmers as lazy and primitive natives who were labelled in opposition to civilized industrious colonizers. Likewise, the continued oppositional views of Ghanaian farmers and agricultural experts half a century later have left me hesitant towards characterising these conflicts as first and foremost a matter of colonial perspectives versus indigenous ones. Rather, based on my research, the issue seems more like a matter of formally educated agricultural experts versus farmers with habits formed by practical experience.

Even though Ghanaian cocoa can likely neither historically nor currently be classified entirely as a crop borne as a result of European colonial engagements in West Africa, in the wake of colonialism several factors from those times still influence and delimit the activities of people in the area today. The rather muddled perspectives emerging out of my materials have not only made it difficult for me to reply with definitively clear answers to the puzzled Immigration Officer's "black vs. white" question, but it has furthermore kept me hesitant about the suitability of applying any explicitly 'post-colonial' academic perspective on the case of the contemporary Ghanaian cocoa business.

In other words, I find the whole question of 'natives' versus 'outsiders' and the 'colonial' versus the 'post-colonial', etc. to represent approaches to the topic of experiences of differences that all too quickly risk becoming bogged down in unproductive dichotomous essentialized categories based around all too stiff *à priori* terms applied from afar. Even more radical ideas, such as that of a decidedly 'de-colonial' analytical perspective (see for instance Mignolo 2009), I find suffers from this risk, as yet

another label emerging from attempts at escaping the throes of prior ones. Research by Yarrow (2008) further shows how the term of ‘indigenous knowledge’ has in Ghana quickly become appropriated by local development workers, traditional chiefs, and media alike, and as such this term is now employed in ways that confuse the distinctions between ‘indigenous’ and ‘western’ perspectives originally intended by foreign development actors and academic analysts. As it is, shaping the present analytical inquiries through these perspectives would thus likely lead to me towards the creation of yet another particularly framed ‘representational space’ (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 41) that legitimizes itself more through academic analytical abstraction than empirical references.

At this point, following my discussions of value theory in Chapter 2, it should not be very difficult to glean my present stance on issues of the post-colonial term. Instead of attempting to obtain an understanding of the conditions surrounding the contemporary cocoa production in my fieldwork area through the application of an academic analysis focused explicitly on ‘post-colonial’ issues, on native agency despite attempted subjugation by outside forces, I have instead chosen to approach such concepts as yet other expressions of ‘meaningful difference’, of conceptual boundaries that only at specific times and places emerge into significance and thereby form spatialized values. Like other classic essentializing dualistic presumptions as us//them, developed//developing, Western World//Africa, North//South, Occident//Orient, etc., the question posed to me by the Ghanaian border official evoked at that time and place a dichotomous categorical distinction between so-called ‘black’ and ‘white’ people that re-cast the significance of cocoa as a differently valued entity. Meanwhile, among other Ghanaians, cocoa cultivation remained much less a matter of white people versus black, than one of indigenous smugglers versus government officials, farmers versus agricultural experts, or even the general public against corrupt elites. Of course, many other forms of perceived conceptual boundaries concurrently shape the different forms of significance associated with cocoa around the southwestern borderlands of Ghana and not all of them as clearly binary as the examples above.

I will henceforth proceed with the focus on the multiple boundaries – material as conceptual – that together contribute to make cocoa emerge as a particular form of natural good throughout my fieldwork area. In some cases boundary forms can be traced back to colonial era influences, while in other cases indigenous boundary concepts are evident instead. While I will attempt to trace the background of each, my ambition is to reach an understanding of the rather complexly constituted and value-charged spaces that emerge out of the combined recognitions of multiple such boundaries among the contemporary people inhabiting this area. Cultivation of cocoa within this area

as a whole has come to take place under a particular combination of enabling and delimiting factors that all influence what the cocoa may come to mean and represent to the people here.

For my purpose of approaching cocoa as a particular expression combining notions of space and value, it follows that its spatial value – its potential “cocoanness” – is bounded by the ways in which its existence here brushes up against, is limited by, and overflows the enacted boundaries of other entities recognized as present. Again, proceeding from de Saussure’s conceptualization of value as meaningful difference, as something that emerges out of comparison with any and all of that which it is not, I pursue an analysis of the cocoa here as an emergent entity that attains value to people through the many ways in which it travels, all the while it remains a dynamic co-constituting part of the spaces around it.

The Emergence of a Territorial Boundary Line

At the rural border road immigrations checkpoint – as has also been the case in Topman village and the town of Akaatiso – the Ghanaian-Ivoirian boundary line appears as solidified into a form that is explicitly recognised yet does not make that much sense to the people living there, an experience commonly shared among people living in borderlands in many parts of the world (see for instance Donnan & Wilson 2010; Sandberg 2009; Griffiths 1986; Plessz 1968). To some locals in this part of Ghana the national demarcation line can most days be largely ignored, unless they carry contraband goods – most frequently cocoa – which in those cases demand extra discretion. For the border officials, on the other hand, enforcement of the line is an explicit part of their assigned duties and therefore not something that can be easily ignored or forgotten, even when its purpose does not make complete sense to them. With the boundary line as an imposing fact, it does not seem far-fetched to me that a border official would express puzzlement as to why this demarcation of difference has come to be exactly so. The question piqued my curiosity too, but during my fieldworks in this border region I met no locally residing persons who could enlighten me much on the historical reasons for the placement of the border line exactly here. Not that I had in fact expected anyone to do so, since here as elsewhere knowledge of the reasons for the establishment of a given barrier is in no way a necessary precondition for someone to become affected by it. Still, whatever the reasons for the geographical placement of the Ghanaian-Ivoirian boundary line, the matter had apparently been decided before the living memory of even the eldest of my informants.

Regarding the location of the boundary line most often the people I spoke with have replied simply that it must have been “made by white people in the olden days”, relegating the precise reasons and timeframe for the contemporary condition to some sort of undifferentiated historical past, and again by reference to some uniform grouping of “white people”. Such verbal acts of brushing off historical matters are fairly common among Ghanaians (Berry 2001: 50), and it is only during later deskwork studies that I have learned more in depth about the historical reasons for the positioning of the contemporary border. The circumstances that once led to the establishment of this boundary line, I find, are relevant for an understanding of the wider dynamics between structures and possibilities that all together shape the valuations of spaces and living conditions of people in this region today, along with their primary source of income in the form of cocoa cultivation.

The historical origins of the contemporary international boundary line between Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire is not to be found here inland among the tropical forests and cocoa farms but rather at a very particular spot along the coastline directly to the south. In 1872 the British had officially taken over all interests of the Dutch Appolonia colony and incorporated that territory into their own Gold Coast colony (Saffu 1970). This westward expansion brought the areas now controlled by the British into direct contact with the French colonial territories at the small coastal village of Newtown, which had been described in the British – Dutch deal as the westernmost point of the Dutch sphere of interest on the Coast of Guinea. The little Newtown fisherman’s village soon after became the focal point for the negotiations of the first specific border agreements made between the two remaining European colonial rivals in the area. According to historian E. O. Saffu the outcome of these negotiations resulted in the following: “The British boundary started from the coast at Newtown, at a distance of five-eighths of a mile to the west of the house occupied by the British Commissioners in 1884” (ibid: 293). Evidently, the first demarcation of this later national boundary line started out from a quite remarkable combination of geographical specificity and seeming arbitrariness on a background of diplomatic negotiations between two European colonial powers. The placement of the boundary at exactly five-eighths of a mile west of one particular coastal village house seemed to have been based most of all on a British desire at the time not to risk splitting the growing Newtown settlement itself between the two powers (ibid: 292).

This initial boundary demarcation was gradually expanded inland over the next decades through further agreements made between the British and the French based on various trade expeditions and treaties entered with indigenous rulers. From the initial point west of Newtown the border was extended straight north across the Tano lagoon and then followed the Tano River upstream

until five miles past the river town of Nugua, from where it went northwest until it reached the Boi River. The thalweg of this river then constituted the border line northwards until the latitude of Yau at 5° 44'N. Then the boundary continued north along the Lonsdale Road (a suggested trade route surveyed by the British Captain Lonsdale in 1881-82 as part of an attempt to strengthen ties between the Gold Coast colony and the indigenous inland state of Gyaman, in the region that is now divided between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire (See Dumett 1971: 92, Dickson 1969: 215-17)) up to Bontuku at 8°N, and finally from thereon along the thalweg of the Black Volta river up to 9°N (Saffu 1970: 297). This definition of the Gold Coast – Côte d'Ivoire border was finally decided upon by the British and the French governments in 1893 after a preceding series of negotiations and demarcation missions had been conducted between 1883-84 and 1889-93 by representatives of these colonizing nations. Later ratifications and establishments of geographical beacons took place in 1905 and again with adjustments in 1925-26 (ibid). The technical specificity described through this boundary demarcation made it different from the more loosely bounded forms of territorial divisions previously pursued among the European powers around coastal Africa, as exemplified by the preceding British-Dutch deal's emphasis on 'spheres of interest'.

The form of boundaries expressed by the Europeans during the early colonial times corresponded quite well with I. W. Zartman's characterization of the pre-colonial boundary concept in North and West Africa as one of frontier *marches* rather than border lines (Zartman 1965: 160). The term 'marches' has today lost much of its original European medieval meaning which was that of an unaligned border zone or a neutral buffer area between two centres of power (from the Indo-European root *merg-*)⁵⁴. Such frontier marches could sometimes be characterised as entities of power in their own right, as exemplified by the European titles of nobility, such as 'Marquis'/'Markgreve'/'Markgraf' for recognised rulers of such places, but most importantly for this context *marches* were defined most of all by their positions and distance relative to other recognised centres of power. A. I. Asiwaju likewise emphasizes how pre-colonial African states were characterised by dynamic frontier zones rather than specific boundaries (Asiwaju 1983). Other researchers have similarly described the Akan cosmology as based on perceptions of human power and order as something that is emanating or "rippling" outward from the centre of their community (Wilks 1993: 200) and which stands in perpetually uneasy opposition to the powerful spirit world of the surrounding forest (Boni 2007; McCaskie 1986). The

⁵⁴ American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. S.v. "Indo-European root merg-." Retrieved January 27 2016 from http://www.thefreedictionary.com/_/roots.aspx?type=Indo-European&root=merg-

human focal point thus rests on the allegiance of people rather than control of specific areas of geography, and as such these frontier marches remained highly changeable over time as populations developed and moved and as power centres shifted. In the pre- and early colonial West African context this concept of flexible territorial spaces described quite well both the dynamics of the indigenous tribal based groups as well as the European ambitions towards establishing beachheads of trading posts along the African coastline. Along the Bight of Guinea the first several centuries of European engagements were characterised primarily by desires of trade relations with the coastal ethnic groups, and the power and significance of the individual European forts and trading posts waxed and waned through shifting local alliances, inland trade route changes, and changes in each European power holder's supply lines of ships, people, and trade goods, along with recurrent incidents of hostile takeovers conducted by other colonial or indigenous powers (Dickson 1969).

Through the end of the 18th Century the presence and control exercised by the various European powers along the West African coast was largely limited to the areas immediately surrounding their forts and trading posts, and to the Europeans the interior continent beyond the major river estuaries remained mostly unknown. The geographical knowledge concerning the entire coastal outline was however quickly established, and already by the late middle of the 17th Century (see for instance John Seller's 1671 map) the appearance of the African continent to the Europeans took on that of a continuous frontier zone between what could be described as the known and the unknown, between a thin line of European rule (or at least access to, knowledge of, and influence on) and the unruled wildness beyond. The European imagination of the African interior as a vast untapped space of valuable resources had soon turned the coastal and river areas into frontier zones, or in other words what I will suggest to call 'boundaries of meaningful difference' through which goods attained increased value through their movement from one space into another. The initial extractive efforts of various competing European powers escalated into what has subsequently been known as the 'European scramble for Africa' that culminated in the years leading up to the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 (Katzenellenbogen 1996; Griffiths 1986; Hargreaves 1985), mirroring similar logics that had gradually led to increased consolidation into national and imperial territories throughout Europe itself. The European view of Africa consequently changed from one of frontier marches surrounding locally held centres of power into one of formally divided territorial lines instead, signifying a break from the concept of rulership still practiced by the indigenous groups.

Over several centuries the European colonial powers had encountered ongoing troubles with the ascertainment of the pre-existing extents and boundaries of various indigenous West African

kingdoms and ethnic tribal areas (see also Chapter 2, p.63-64). The increasing European insistence on measured geographic specificity also contributed to the colonizers' eventual sharp territorial divisions of otherwise fuzzily bounded indigenous conceptual groups such as the Kingdom of Gyaman or the Asante⁵⁵ state, along with the subdivision of African rivers along their thalwegs and other sections of landscape according to geometric lines imposed from afar. Again, a driving factor here was the way that European efforts toward classification over the course of the 19th Century had changed from a basis on 'spheres of interest' to geographically defined territorial 'boundary lines'. The previously discussed decade or so between the British 1872 takeover of the Dutch sphere of interest on the West African coast and the later British-French negotiations of boundary lines between their colonies would appear to exemplify this rather paradigmatic change in the ways in which the European powers envisaged the dimensions of their African engagements.

Considerations towards the conservation of various indigenous tribal groups and lands had featured as part of the late 19th Century British-French negotiations of territorial lines, but mostly as part of claims presented by either party of prior treaties of trade or allegiances entered between indigenous tribal chiefs and European agents acting on behalf of the colonial powers. Documentation of the exact extents of tribal domains had not proven easy for either of the colonial authorities, as various European missions had come to different conclusions concerning the reach and extent of allegiances of various tribal communities towards one ethnic group or chief elsewhere. As a compromise between contestant French-British claims some tribal territories were eventually split between the colonial powers, which included the large indigenous states of Gyaman, Aowin, and Nzima (Saffu 1970: 298), or, according to Asiwaju (1985: 257) Sanwi, Afema, and Lobi, in addition to a number of smaller societies.

With the consolidation of European territorial claims along the African coastline had followed the gradual further specification of geographical boundaries between them, and from such boundaries the gazes of the colonizers had increasingly sought inland to the as-yet undivided interior of the continent. From there, processes of secondary differentiations continued subdividing the African continent into smaller administrative territories, inside each of which the ruling colonial power could map out their own subsections of frontiers and regulated categories of spaces. Geographer Neil Smith has described these kinds of parcellations driven by colonial and capitalistic ambitions as conversions of 'relative space' into 'absolute space' (Smith 1984: 85). This terminology further supports the view that

⁵⁵ I use the older term *Asante* here, although the more typically encountered spelling today is *Ashanti*.

the organizing principle among the European colonizers over time changed from spheres of interest emanating from centres of power to a principle of clearly bounded territories encapsulating the same.

Returning now once again to the question posed by the Ghanaian border official, both the actual national boundary line along with the principles that inform it have indeed come about through the imposition of European decisions rather than locally supported initiatives. The two contemporary nations of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are themselves outcomes of European politics, and had the British and the French not negotiated a territorial split of the kingdom of Gyaman among themselves in the late 1800s, then neither would today's national boundary line have come to run exactly as it does now. It could perhaps still be debated whether this historical division of Gyaman had constituted a "conspiracy between white people to keep black men fighting against each other", since the original division had indeed served to settle British-French rivalries in the area at the expense of dividing the indigenous population. As for the border officer's specific question of whether different national cocoa prices could be said to constitute a conspiracy for the purpose of pitting indigenous people against each other, I find that the answer should in all likelihood be considered in the negative, given how the contemporary Ghanaian cocoa pricing system remains different from the Ivoirian one primarily due to the opposition upheld by the Ghanaian state against deregulation initiatives championed by the World Bank and IMF in the late 1980s and forward (Kolavalli & Vigneri 2011; Fold 2004; Gilbert & Varangis 2003), initiatives which were ultimately implemented in Côte d'Ivoire.

As alluded to in the opening description of my short interaction with the conspiracy concerned border official, I had left the encounter again fairly convinced that my words had done little to dissuade his suspicions that his own role as a border-stationed official was somehow part of a larger set of struggles artificially orchestrated by powerful others elsewhere. The longer I spent time around the communities in the vicinity of the Ghanaian – Ivoirian boundary line, the more clearly I came to sense that boundaries to the population here took on a quite complex appearance of being concurrently solid, permeable, and overlapping.

Many sorts of boundaries encountered around this region today have originally been put in place primarily due to particular desires and influences of foreign powers and stakeholders, whose approaches to the concept of boundary demarcations, ownership, and classifications of territory differ significantly from the boundary approaches of the indigenous Sefwi-Akan traditions. The colonial efforts towards organising and classifying the West African landscapes by distinctive geographical features, political powers, or simply geometric lines based on compass directions or longitude/latitude have only been partially successful. Despite overall colonial efforts towards the establishments of

mutually recognized formal divisions of African territories among themselves, the colonizers' subsequent attempts to also organise and rule the populations inside each of such sharply demarcated territories proved much less straight forward. The combined influence of these different approaches, as I will argue, constitutes one of the key reasons why contemporary cocoa farming throughout this region constitutes a quite complexly dimensioned and highly dynamic value space.

In order to develop this argument further I will now continue with the exploration of another non-indigenous form of regional boundary establishment that likewise significantly influences the ways in which cocoa is cultivated and emerges as meaningful and valuable throughout my fieldwork area in rural southwestern Ghana.

The Boundaries of Three Nature Preserves

The national boundary line towards Côte d'Ivoire is not the only enforced geographic boundary line encountered in the contemporary Sefwi area where I did most of my 2014-15 fieldwork. In fact this part of Western Region of Ghana includes multiple areas of land that over the second half of the 20th Century have become hotbeds of contestant claims to land rights, between not only individual farm land tenants and local traditional authorities, but also involving the national authorities as well. Merely a few kilometres to the northeast of the border town of Akaatiso one encounters the southwestern angular tip of the *Bia National Park/Bia Resource Reserve* and further to the east is situated *Krokosua Hills Forest Reserve*, another area claimed by the Ghanaian national government. Furthermore, the westernmost half of the geographical area situated directly between the district capital town of Juaboso and the Ivoirian border lies within what to the national authorities remains classified as 'Bia Tawya Forest Reserve', an area which however since the late 1960s has been so heavily encroached upon by cocoa farming settlers that the original forest vegetation is now practically gone (Edusah 2011; IUCN 2010; England 1993). Consequently, references to this area by the abovementioned name are only seldomly encountered today.⁵⁶ Instead, as previously mentioned in relation to the village of Topman – which is also situated within Bia Tawya – this entire area can to some degree be compared

⁵⁶ The name of the local *Bia-Torya Community Bank Ltd.* was the only publicly displayed reference I encountered in the area during fieldworks in 2014-2015, albeit with a slightly different spelling – a common occurrence since an authoritative Sefwi dictionary or grammar book has not yet been published (see also Boni (2007) regarding Sefwi spellings, as well as Austin (2005: xix) for a similar disclaimer regarding spelling practices of the neighbouring Asante place names).

to a 'frontier' or 'march'-land, an ambiguously positioned zone between power centres situated elsewhere, contested and orphaned at times, object of overlapping yet incommensurable claims expressed by different actors who base their claims on different criteria of validity and from different points of view.

These three nature preserves have each been claimed by the Ghanaian government as off bounds for agricultural purposes, which in effect constitute them as particular valuable spaces in their own right. Still, the various ways in which cocoa farming has come to lead up to, become delimited by, and encroaching upon the boundaries of such areas, offer insights into cocoa as a spatially bound value generating activity in contemporary Sefwi. Both the Bia and the Krokosua were initially demarcated as protected forest reserve areas in 1935 by the now former British Gold Coast Colony administration (UNESCO 2013).⁵⁷ The reasons for the establishment of these and similar areas within the colonial territory were at the time explained as being for the purposes of safeguarding watersheds and "to assist in the well-being of the forest and agricultural crops grown on the said lands or in the vicinity thereof" (Hawthorne & Abu-Juam 1995: 5, citing a colonial Forest Ordinance of 1927). At the time most of the far southwestern parts of the Gold Coast colonial territory lay as sparsely populated so-called 'virgin' tropical forest, so the demarcations of hundreds of square kilometres of Reserve Forests could be drawn on geographical survey maps in the capital of Accra with apparently little to no practical consideration or immediate consequences for the people and the wildlife whose existing livelihoods in the areas did not conform to the geometric boundary delineations imposed from afar.

⁵⁷ References to the initial demarcation of Bia Tawya are in turn more scarce, but according to UNEP-WCMC (United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre) Bia Tawya had been classified as a forest reserve in 1965 (UNEP-WCMC 2016a).



Image 11: The three major designated nature preserves of the westernmost half of the Sefwi traditional area, as classified by the Ghanaian government. Bia National Park & Resource Reserve is for most parts considered the same administrative unit. Krokosua Hills has since the late 20th century been heavily encroached upon. Bia Tawya now exists only by name; the entire area has been parcelled out into cocoa farm properties. The entire depicted area east of the yellow national boundary line is furthermore classified as Sefwi traditional tribal lands. Map designations drawn by this text's author based on data from UNEP-WCMC (2016a) overlaid on satellite imagery accessed through Google Earth™.

Particularly the 1960s and 70s influx of migrant cocoa farmers brought to the fore the conflicting definition of these lands as concurrently Sefwi tribal lands under the traditional stewardship of the Boinzanhene (and to some degree also disputed as belonging to the Omanhene of Wiawso - see Boni 2008; England 1993) and as national forest reserves governed by the state. In consequence, this meant that the presence of the pioneering cocoa farmers here were simultaneously approved by the local chiefs, who leased out or sold land rights to them, while these same farmers were also considered illegal trespassers, who were repeatedly threatened with eviction by state representatives (England 1993). Between the 1960s and the early 1980s especially the chief of Boinzan leased out (or sold, depending on who one asks) parcels of land to numerous prospective cocoa farmers who had come to petition him for such. These land plots were in most cases situated within the Bia-Tawya Forest Reserve area. Leaving aside the question of legality of ownership/stewardship for the moment, the

prospective landholders offered the Boinzan chief traditional symbolic gifts as well as money in exchange for plots of these lands, transactions for which far from all of them received written paper deeds as documentation.

Although active government boundary enforcements were largely absent from the forested frontiers of western Sefwi during these hectic mid-twentieth century years of migrations, the Bia Forest Reserve area came to form one exception. Since the 1960s this area had gained the attention of international nature preservationists due to reports indicating a presence here of a diverse and rare wildlife, including rare species of monkeys (red colobus monkeys) and forest elephants. Successful lobbying efforts with the Ghanaian government led to the upgrade of Bia to National Park status in 1974, and with its higher ranked status the area was now also assigned a permanent staff of park rangers to patrol and preserve the integrity of its borders against poachers, mining prospectors, encroaching farmsteaders, timber loggers, and other potential trespassers. Anthropologist and primate specialist John F. Oates followed the lobbying process at the time and later wrote the following retrospective remark regarding the deliberations that informed the upgrade of Bia from Forest Reserve to National Park:

“The Bia Tributaries South Forest Reserve was eventually chosen, in part because Peace Corps volunteer Michael Rucks, working with the Department of Game and Wildlife, reported that red colobus monkeys were relatively abundant here but were no longer found in the nearby Krokosua Hills Forest Reserve, the first area considered for park status.” (Oates 1999: 182)

Despite the official designation in 1974, the Bia National Park got off to an uncertain start over the next few years under the administration of the Acheampong military regime, which had come to power in Ghana through a coup in 1972. By 1977 the regime granted a major concession to the timber industry by redefining the southern app. 70% of the Bia National Park area as a so-called ‘Game Production Reserve’, allowing commercial logging activities to be licensed in the area (ibid.). These boundary lines between Bia as both a national park and as a forest reserve have since that time remained in place up until today, while Krokosua Hills throughout the entire period has maintained its status as forest reserve, with consequent commercial logging activities taking place. Bia Tawya, meanwhile, became fully parcelled out and taken over by cocoa pioneers during the latter half of the 20th century, despite recurrent eviction warnings by the state against prospective settlers and various

resolution attempts pursued through political committees, the national court systems, and at times through direct military intervention⁵⁸ (England 1993).

The red colobus monkeys that had been described above as the main reason for the establishment of Bia National Park belonged to a particular West African subspecies known as ‘Miss Waldron’s red colobus monkey’⁵⁹. The consideration for these monkeys which influenced the decision to switch around the National Park status from Krokosua Hills to Bia, seem in hindsight to have been in vain. No further confirmed sightings of Miss Waldron’s red colobus were made anywhere in Ghana after 1978, and in the year 2000 an article by the aforementioned professor Oates together with other regional experts announced the probable extinction of this particular primate subspecies (Oates et al. 2000). Although a few years later one of the same article’s co-authors presented some new evidence that a small isolated population of red colobus monkeys might still survive in a remote southeast part of Côte d’Ivoire (Ohio State University 2004), the subspecies seems to have vanished altogether from its former Ghanaian habitats, including both of its intended refuge areas of Bia and the nearby Krokosua Hills.

The disappearance of the Miss Waldron’s red colobus monkey constitutes one example of the massive environmental changes caused by the influx of human settlers who have gradually cut down much of the region’s existing vegetation and instead turned the mixed tropical forests into monocrop cocoa landscapes. While the original Forest Ordinance of 1935 had formed the Bia and the Krokosua reserves partially based on the argument of supporting and protecting the nearby agricultural activities, less than half a century later these very reserves instead appeared as isolated pockets of wilderness amid a sea of intensive cocoa cultivation, prompting alarmed nature preservationists to call for a changed focus on the reserves as the real places in need of support and protection instead (Oates 1999). Despite decades of government licensed (along with illegal) logging activities inside both forest reserves, as well as numerous stories of illegal ‘galamsey’ gold mining expeditions and poaching activities, and finally also examples of attempted gradual land encroachments from neighbouring farms,

⁵⁸ The frontier village of Bonsu Nkwanta, situated within the Bia Tawya area, was reportedly at some point in the mid- 1970s burnt to the ground by the Ghanaian army as part of the anti-encroachment efforts by the authorities at the time (see England 1993: 166). However, the village was soon rebuilt by its pioneer inhabitants and exists today as a bustling cocoa frontier town.

⁵⁹ *Procolobus badius waldroni* - The name refers to one Miss F. Waldron, of whom little is recorded to this day apart from the fact that she worked as a field assistant to the British museums collector, Willoughby P. Lowe, who shot and collected the first eight specimens in 1933 (Oates et al 2000: 1527).

it might seem remarkable how both the Bia and the Krokosua Hills still exist to this day with formal outlines largely matching those originally drawn about eighty years ago. Tighter government enforcements of the boundaries since the 1990ies may be part of the reasons for this, and although preservationist concerns for the wellbeing of the forest wildlife came into force too late to secure the continued livelihood of the Miss Waldron's red colobus, other animal species such as the forest elephant have still managed to not only survive but also thrive in the Bia area, an aspect with relevance for the cocoa cultivation of this area, which I will return to again later in this chapter.

First, in order to fully set up for a discussion of the complexities surrounding the many boundaries of the Sefwi area cocoa farming today, I will in the following present some of the key characteristics of the traditional Sefwi-Akan history and customary approaches to ownership and distribution of land rights, and in turn also the forms of divisions of that which such land spaces may produce.

Radiant Spaces: The Fuzzy Boundaries of Sefwi-Akan Tradition

I have carried out most of my 2014-15 fieldworks around parts of the cocoa producing regions of southwestern Ghana that comprise the governmental administrative districts of Sefwi Wiawso, Juaboso, Bodi, and Bia. These districts are all traditionally considered part of the Sefwi tribal lands, but detailed historical records pertaining to this overall geographical region and its people do not extend back much further than the middle of the 19th Century (Boni 2005, 2001; Ofori 2004; Daaku 1971). Pre-colonial human presence and activities in these interior regions of the southern borderlands between contemporary Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have in general only been sporadically documented, and most knowledge of the times before the 19th Century has been preserved solely in oral history and traditions. Since early colonial times, from the arrival of the first Europeans on the coasts near the turn of the 15th Century, people living in what was later to be recognised as the Sefwi area found themselves cushioned from direct European contact by a number of other indigenous groups, such as the Aowin, Wassa, Nzima, Ahanta and Fante to the South, the Asante (and before the 1700s the Denkyira) to the East, and the Gyaman to the North. One of the first written mentions of 'Sefwi' appeared in the British traveller T.E. Bowdich' account from 1819, where there he indicated a state called 'Sawee' in the lands to the west of Kumasi (Daaku 1971: 33)⁶⁰. Another reason that the 'Sefwi' ethnic name only started

⁶⁰ See Bowdich (1819: ii). Bowdich' map itself was printed with a year marker of 1817.

appearing in early 19th Century sources, has been hypothesised by anthropologist Stefano Boni to be partially the result of increasing autonomy of local tribal leaderships in this area, as the region's people came to serve as vassals under Asante rule, following the decline of Aowin and Denkyira powers over the area around the closing decades of the 18th Century (Boni 2001). Over the 18th and 19th Centuries the Sefwi area also became increasingly part of a system of trade routes linked to the Asante capital of Kumasi, and at some point during the same period the Ansantehene (the paramount chief of the Asante) enforced a continual presence at his Kumasi court, of members of the Sefwi royal family that had based their own seat of rule in the town of Sefwi Wiawso (ibid: 33-34). This description of Sefwi as a loosely defined geographical area and tribal designation that gradually came to emerge as a recognized entity on its own resonates, in my interpretation, with the view of the historical Sefwi region as a sort of marchland zone between other power centres (from Aowin and Denkyira to subsequently Gyaman and Asante).

In the latter part of the 19th Century the British colonial administration had as an overall strategy sought to expand and secure their rule of the interior Gold Coast colony through the establishment of formal alliances with indigenous tribal groups. The continued rights of these groups to handle local matters were recognised by the colonizers in return for their acceptance of British overall supremacy - and accordingly acceptance of their own positions as colonial subjects in the British Empire. The Sefwi became embroiled in these colonial ambitions as tension gradually increased between the British colonial state at the coast and the inland Asante kingdom. As a result of the British military invasion of Asante in 1874, Kwaku Kye, who at that time was the Sefwi ruler of Wiawso, contemplated the shifting power relations in the region and eventually in 1879 he formally withdrew the Sefwi from their century-long allegiance to the Asante and sought British colonial protection instead. The Sefwi then actively participated on British side in the later violent conflicts against the Asante (Boni 2001: 37-38). The British in turn officially recognised the Wiawso *oman* [kingdom] as a British Protectorate in 1887, and from 1896 they stationed a District Commissioner there as direct representative of the colonial rule.

Already in 1900 the commissioner at the time, Hobart, found it necessary to intervene in the tribal stool⁶¹ succession and impose the candidate who appeared most loyal to British colonial interests (ibid: 39), essentially marking the end of a short period of absolute Sefwi tribal autonomy in the area. This incident was but one of numerous that hinted at the problems that confronted the British

⁶¹ [i.e. chiefly jurisdiction]

colonizers in their ambitions of solidifying their control of the area by imposing clearly organized rules and regulations. Anthropologist Sara Berry has emphasized another aspect that made colonial efforts towards administration so difficult in both the Ghanaian as well as the larger West African context: “Historical boundaries between chiefly jurisdictions or lands occupied or used by different groups of people were often vague or undefined; authority over land did not necessarily coincide with authority over people; and people were disconcertingly ready to vote with their feet against unpopular chiefs or headmen” (Berry 2002: 644). Again, Berry’s arguments parallel both Zartman’s (1965) and Wilks’ (1993, 1992) discussions of indigenous West African groups and boundaries as units constituted primarily by the allegiances of people to certain political power centres rather than statically defined geographical spaces as such.

Questions pertaining to the administration of land rights in particular proved persistently troublesome in the British Gold Coast Colony as well as in the later independent Ghanaian state, as multiple researchers have documented (see for instance Nugent 2010, 2002; Lentz 2003; Berry 2002, 2001; Crook 1986). Political scientist Richard Crook wrote for example that: “By the time of the 1927 NJO [Native Jurisdiction Ordinance], the British had come to interpret community ownership of land as meaning that the Stool particularly the Paramount Stool should be viewed as a public corporate body, holding community resources in trust, as it were, and quite distinct from the ‘private’ interests of families or individuals” (Crook 1986: 90). This amalgamation of British law traditions and Akan customary leadership proved very difficult to implement in praxis, given the foundational differences in the underlying logics and philosophies informing the two sets of traditions. As Berry explains, “Indirect rule was based on a premise of timeless custom, but the chiefs, elders and others who were presumed to “know custom” often told conflicting stories. “Custom” itself was imagined, simultaneously, as an enduring body of constitutional principles and an on-going practice of historical interpretation and debate” (Berry 2002: 645). Therefore, despite the European colonial efforts to regulate and enforce firm geographical boundaries and legal frameworks, the indigenous pre-colonial views aligned to other logics of boundaries persisted to a wide degree. As Berry, however, also notes, the experiences of profound differences did not deter the organisational efforts of the colonizers: “Colonial administrators devoted considerable time and attention to demarcating boundaries – administrative boundaries to define their own jurisdictions; territorial boundaries to resolve competing claims to land and office; and social boundaries to define arenas of authority and obligations for chiefs and commoners alike.” (Berry 2001: 7).

The Ghanaian system of customary law operates with the principle that land rights are held in a three-tier structure (Takane 2002). In the most primordial tier are rights to land held by whole ethnic groups and held in custody by the paramount chief who in turn entrusts divisions to local area chiefs. On the secondary tier one finds the rights to utilize certain areas of land held by certain individuals or lineages. Finally, on the third tier comes various usufruct rights obtained by way of contracts between tenants and rights holders on the preceding tiers. This means that contrary to Western legal tradition of individual ownership of land, in Ghana multiple individuals as well as groups of people can simultaneously maintain legally recognised claims to the same piece of land. This principled feature is likewise summed up in the Akan maxim that “The farm is mine but the soil belongs to the stool” (Amanor 2001: 25; see also Wilks 1993: 99⁶²). In the following section I will first look closer at the two primary tiers of customary land rights, since these both concern the concept of ownership of land itself. The third tier concerning the rights to what the land produces will be analysed subsequently.

The first tier of customary land rights concerns whole ethnic groups, and the Sefwi had gained recognition as one such group through their treaty with the British colonizers and their uprising against the Asante in the closing decades of the 19th Century. The Sefwi traditional area, following the 1879 independence from its role of vassal to the Asantehene of Kumasi, became considered as composed of three different kingdoms, each kingdom [ɔman] ruled by a paramount chief residing in one of the three towns of Anhwiaso, Sefwi Bekwai, and Sefwi Wiawso (Boni 1999: 50). The kingdom of Sefwi Wiawso, situated furthest west and covering the largest part of the Sefwi territory, forms the primary focus for the present analytical purposes, since most of my contemporary ethnographic fieldwork studies took place within this area. The paramount chief [ɔmanhene] of Sefwi Wiawso rules over deputized local area chiefs in the towns of Boinzan and Debiso, a particular power structure that had been formalised early on under British colonial rule (Boni 2000: 575). The chiefs of Boinzan and Debiso, due to the geographical locations of their towns, administer large areas of land in the westernmost part of the region which lead directly up to the Ivorian border, which itself had been established not long before the British recognition of the Sefwi tribe itself. These lands include the later designated Bia National Park, and the forest reserve areas of Krokosua Hills and Bia Tawya.⁶³ With the

⁶² Wilks presents a slightly different translation that goes: “The farm is my property, the land is the king’s.” (Wilks 1993: 99).

⁶³ Included – but beyond my immediate empirical fieldwork area – was also the Forest Reserve area of Sukusuku which lay nested between Bia and the Ivorian boundary line, and, which like Bia Tawya, also became completely encroached by cocoa farms over the latter half of the twentieth century (see Edusah 2011, UNER-WCMC

increasing number of people moving to these remote areas and with such migrants' petitions for access to farmland, the paramount chief in Wiawso along with the two sub-chiefs in Boinzan and Debiso soon actively parcelled out and sold – or leased – farming rights to immigrant cocoa farmers over a period of time roughly from the late 1950s to the early 1980s, after which no more uncultivated lands remained accessible (England 1993, Awanyo 1998).

The second tier beneath the collective land rights of entire ethnic groups include both land plots owned by 'citizens' (indigenous Sefwi family lineages) and lands sold or leased out by chiefs to 'strangers' (migrants) (Takane 2002: 36). In the second instance, land rights are not automatically possible to hand over to others through later inheritance or gifts, but are in principle to be returned to tribal control after the death of the lease taker. The latter instance is however an issue which is generally considered renegotiable, according to the migrant farmers I interviewed in 2014-15. Several such farmers, however, do often not possess formal written contracts, deeds, or other notarized land lease papers documenting their claims, partially since some of the original grants of farming plots by Sefwi chiefs had been carried out in the traditional Sefwi-Akan manner through physical demarcations of simple boundaries on the spot, or by verbal reference to various visible features in the terrain, all supported solely by eye witnesses present during each demarcation event. As Awanyo writes of such approaches: "The [system] called *doko* (cultivate onwards) involved the granter escorting the farmer into the forests, indicating the lands, showing a stream or valley as a baseline, and then asking the farmer to continue cultivating till he/she meets the next stream or valley. Thus, boundaries of the land were not demarcated." (Awanyo 1998: 522). According to Dickson (1969) cocoa farmers traditionally made the width of such individually assigned strip farms (at least in the Krobo and Shai areas of south eastern Ghana) correspond to one 'rope', a unit of measurement defined as twelve lengths of a man's outstretched arms (Dickson 1969: 303 – see also Wilks 1993: 196). Apart from the *doko* approach at other times a customary method called *twama* [carve out] is used instead, which involves a walk around an area to fully indicate the boundary outlines of the land plot about to be granted (Awanyo 1998: 522). This latter approach in particular became more commonly utilized as unclaimed potential farmland became increasingly scarce throughout the Sefwi area over the second half of the 20th Century. In

2016b.). Author's note: it appears that the Ghana Forestry Commission sourced Forest Reserve size data table presented in Edusah (2011: 13) as pertaining to Sukusuku instead might erroneously refer to Bia Tawya instead, since such would match the 678.58km² registered by UNER-WCMC 2016a. Of further minor note, UNER-WCMC 2016b utilizes a spelling of *Sukusuki Forest Reserve* instead of *Sukusuke Forest Reserve* favoured by the Ghanaian sources I have found.

principle this approach is furthermore also more easily aligned with the form of land registration recognised by the British colonial administration and subsequently by the independent Ghanaian state⁶⁴.

Several researchers (Berry 2009, 2002, 2001; Boni 2008, 2005; Austin 2005; Takane 2002; England 1993) have described examples from the Sefwi, the Asante, and the larger Akan areas where complex disputes over land have arisen with all parties involved basing their claims to ownership on customary law's recognition of oral narratives and histories referring to times before current living memory, as well as before any preserved written historical records. Disputes of such kinds have been persistently difficult to resolve, and Boni, a long-time researcher of the Sefwi traditional area, has estimated that in effect "almost every stool in Sefwi has been involved in some sort of land dispute lasting decades rather than years" (Boni 2008: 91)⁶⁵. According to law professor Philippa England one cause of such chiefly disputes in the Sefwi area of the mid-late 20th Century is due to the fact that "[l]ocal customary law was unclear as to whether sub-chiefs were entitled to act independently of the Omanhene⁶⁶ in the grant of land" (England 1993: 166). Consequently, multiple chiefs would on occasion sell rights to the same (or differently parcelled) piece of land to different people, most of all to the frustration of the buyers and the court system. With the customary law's emphasis on inalienable tribal rights to ancestral lands, newcomers, i.e. 'strangers' to a given area – which includes the large majority of pioneering cocoa farmers throughout the Sefwi traditional area (Knudsen & Fold 2011) – are placed at an initial legal disadvantage if contestant claims to ownership of the same piece of land were to go before the Native Courts. Yet, according to Takane (2002: 49), the planting and maintenance of cocoa farms constitutes one of the most effective strategies that migrant purchasers of farming rights in Sefwi can pursue in order to defend their claims to rightfully possess the farming rights over a specific piece of land against potential later contestations.⁶⁷

During my fieldwork numerous cocoa farmers have related to me how some of the first migrant farmers that came to Sefwi had managed to obtain their farmlands very cheaply or even free of

⁶⁴ Still, as discussed in Yeboah & Shaw (2013: 24), apparently around 80% of all contemporary property developments in Ghana take place without the involvement of the officially designated planning authorities.

⁶⁵ See also Austin (2005: 441-42) for a similar observation regarding land ownership litigation procedures in Asante during the colonial era.

⁶⁶ [i.e. paramount chief]

⁶⁷ In effect a claim of use-right superiority similar to what, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, p.28, has also become enshrined as the official standard in mid- 20th Century Côte d'Ivoire under president Houphouët-Boigny.

charge, since undeveloped land was abundant back then, and the traditional chiefs placed a much lower value on it than what would later become the case. The most famous example of this, among my informants, is the case of the “Danger-mu” farm, a single family owned cocoa farm that today stretches over a vast area of land south of the Bia National Park and Resource Reserve. According to several people living in this western part of Juaboso District, the owners of this land had been granted it all decades ago by the traditional Sefwi chief of Boinzan as a showing of appreciation for a new three-storey house in Accra which the farm petitioner had constructed and gifted to the chief. This land grant took place at a time when many migrants had already started to move into the Bia-Tawya forest reserve lands (in which the gifted land is also situated), and so the new owners rushed to put up some sort of boundary demarcation around their entire freshly obtained property to defend it from other would-be cocoa farmers. The most practical material they could immediately find for this purpose was large rolls of plastic band with the word “DANGER” printed on them, and so to the nearby other migrant farmers this vast outlined *twama* area of the forest quickly came to be locally known as ‘Danger-mu’, which is roughly translatable as “There is danger inside”.⁶⁸ Today, the annual output of cocoa from this particular farm could undoubtedly finance the building of many three-storey city houses. I visited the Danger-mu farm in 2014 and spoke with the current owners, two brothers named Ampadu and George who have inherited the farm from their uncle, the man who had initially obtained it. The brothers spoke proudly of their success with cocoa farming at this place and related to me how their father had even won the Ghanaian national prize for Best Cocoa Farmer of the Year in 1996, an award which each the two brothers had also subsequently won in 2006 and 2012. Their farm currently produces a massive output of 8 to 9.000 bags of cocoa each year, and they have many workers employed to make all of this happen. The Danger-mu farm brothers also told me how the large size of their farm business has even enabled them to successfully lobby the national authorities so that their property has now become connected to the national electricity grid even years before any of the neighbouring villages or towns closest to them.

The Danger-mu farm, to my knowledge, represents quite an anomaly in the Ghanaian cocoa sector, since its geographical dimensions and reliance on hired labour has more in common with the sizes and styles of large-scale cocoa plantations more frequently encountered on the Ivoirian side of the border. The typical Ghanaian cocoa farm is instead a smallholder family enterprise, either where one family has developed their own plot of land or alternatively taken up residence as the daily caretakers of a plantation established by members of another family.

⁶⁸ The [-mu] suffix in Sefwi refers to something beyond or on the inside of something else.

Cocoa Farming on Contestable Lands

The traditional Ghanaian custom also features a conceptual separation between ownership of land and ownership of what grows upon it (Amanor 2007: 218, 1999: 68-69; Awanyo 1998: 519). Thus, while Sefwi chiefs have parcelled out sections of virgin forests to migrant cocoa farmers, the same chiefs still retained the ownership and rights to the timber of any major tropical hardwood trees that already grew there⁶⁹. Cocoa farmers, in turn were expected to leave such trees alone when clearing the forest and only plant their cocoa trees around them. The chiefs would then on their own accord sell off timber concessions to lumber companies⁷⁰. Farmers I interviewed in the Sefwi area uniformly expressed dissatisfaction with this form of arrangement and with the continual presence of tropical hardwood trees on their cocoa plots. These trees represent constant causes for concern, according to cocoa farmers, as lumber companies' eventual felling of large trees and subsequent timber extractions would undoubtedly cause damage to the cocoa trees surrounding them⁷¹. Around the Sefwi area of 2014-15 I recurrently observed cocoa farms with tropical hardwood trees towering above the cocoa canopies, hardwood trees, however, that all appeared completely withered and dead. As I learned, it has apparently become a practice among some worried cocoa farmers to kill such trees on their farms through the use of arboricides or by hammering copper nails into the trunks, consequently rendering the tree trunks worthless to future loggers (see also Amanor (2007, 1999, 1996) for more details on such practices). Depending on the methods utilized farmers could subsequently avoid responsibility by claiming their innocence towards the various authorities. Logging rights aside, as discussed, the same principle of separate rights to what grows on an area of land to some degree also works to protect the farmers as well, since their own investments in the planting of cocoa trees mean that they retain strong arguments for the defence of their usufruct rights to the fruits of the trees on the land plot, even if contestant claims to the ownership of the particular area of land itself were to become successfully challenged by others in the traditional courts.

⁶⁹ Such as baobab, kapok, mahogany, teak, cedar, and many other types.

⁷⁰ Officially speaking, timber concessions are still exclusively issued by the Ghanaian government's Forestry Commission with the traditional chiefs merely receiving royalties from such sales in recognition of their roles as tribal stewards of the forest land. In reality, I was told, chiefs frequently act on their own and arrange concessions without involving the government. See also Teye (2013) for a discussion of practices of corruption as yet another complicating factor in the contemporary Ghanaian logging business.

⁷¹ Notably, other current research likewise points to conflicts arising from lack of policy integration between forestry and agricultural practices in both Ghana and Nigeria (Agbeja & Derkyi 2011).

While questions of ownership of a certain piece of land relates to the first and second tier of customary land rights, the question of the applied usage of the land for farming purposes in turn concerns the third tier. In Sefwi, as in most other parts of southern Ghana, the practical management of farmland typically involves either so-called *abunu* or *abusa* share contracts. *Abunu* literally means ‘that which is divided into two’, while *abusa* in turn means ‘that which is divided into three’ (see Takane 2002: 14). Both of these concepts refer to forms of practical arrangements that are entered between landowners and tenants or caretakers and specifically in regards to the types of divisions by which the future agricultural produce of a piece of land shall be split between the parties involved. Frequently the owner of a piece of land suitable for future cocoa farming will seek to hire others to initially establish and develop it by cutting down the existing vegetation and replanting the area with cocoa seedlings, which will start growing fruits after about three to five years (or, up to seven years for some of the original cocoa varieties planted there). In other cases the land owner will more simply seek someone to maintain an already established cocoa farm plot. As has been documented by Hill (1997 [1963]), it has long been a popular strategy among Ghanaian cocoa farmers to reinvest their profits from cocoa farming in the acquisition of more farming lands, resulting in both a rapid expansion of the total cocoa cultivation area across the tropical southern half of the country, as well a historical tendency towards a shortage of labour for the development and maintenance of such farms. The latter has already been a long-running issue, since especially the harvesting and processing of cocoa beans requires intensive manual work efforts. Family members of Ghanaian farmers have historically been the primary providers of such cocoa farm labour, and low costs of family labour was one reason why household driven cocoa farms flourished in Ghana in the early 20th Century while European colonial attempts with large-scale cocoa plantations during the same time period failed to generate sustainable profits (Austin 1996). Still, cocoa farmers’ reinvestments in ever more land would at certain points exceed the labour capabilities of their own family households and extended family networks, something that has become steadily evident as additional farmlands were purchased in locations increasingly far away from the owner’s original properties. Owners of Ghanaian cocoa farms therefore frequently sought to find tenants to either develop newly acquired land plots for cocoa farming, or to work as caretakers on already developed plots. The choice between *abunu* and *abusa* styles of shareholder arrangements will vary widely depending upon the amount of labour required in order to produce an output of cocoa from a particular piece of land, all coupled with variations in the relative negotiating strengths between the individual landowner and the work seeker (Takane 2002: 29-30). In some cases either party will even find it preferable to simply postpone the formal decision whether to enter one sort of contract or the other until after the tenant labourer has established the initial cocoa farm on the owner’s land (ibid:

22). For a land owner such contract postponements enables them to first estimate the tenant's trustworthiness and dedication to working the farm, whereas for the prospective tenant their successful planting of a perennial crop such as cocoa on the land places them in a stronger position to maintain their usufruct right claims to this very plot of land in case of future land disputes that are to be solved in accordance with customary laws (ibid: 49).

Sharecropping through the *abusa* system has reportedly gained rapid popularity among cocoa labourers already from the 1930s and onward in the Gold Coast Colony and Asante, following the world market economic downturns of the decade that made it harder for farm owners to attract long term wage labourers. Similar tendencies towards proliferation of *abusa*-style tenancy appeared in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1950s as well (Austin 1987: 276-77). In Ghana cocoa farming had spread gradually across the country over the 20th Century from the origins in the inland area of Accra, first to the Volta and Ashanti regions, then the Brong Ahafo region and finally to the farthest reaches of Sefwi in the Western Region. Many contemporary cocoa farmers in the Sefwi area originally came from other parts of Ghana – frequently the relatively more resource and opportunity deprived regions such as Upper West or Upper East – and started out as migrant labourers for other owners of cocoa farms before obtaining their own plots of land. Since the 1980s the lack of further undeveloped lands suitable for cocoa farming coupled with continued Ghanaian population growth has meant that the tendency through recent decades has been towards a further fragmentation of existing cocoa plots into smaller sections as children inherit parts of their parents' cocoa landholdings (Takane 2002: 109). Furthermore, increasingly exorbitant land prices have contributed to channel farmers' cocoa profits into other directions, including the development of properties or businesses in the nearby towns (Knudsen 2010) or larger cities, the latter also connected with the increasing number of city-dwelling absentee cocoa landlords (Takane 2002: 109), and at times such cocoa profits have also been reinvested into other parts of the same business, such as cocoa trucks (Mikell 1992: 93).

Recurrent re-acknowledgements of the ancestral land rights are also expected from the farmers by the recognized rights holders of these lands. Therefore, owners of a cocoa farm plot in the Sefwi area will commonly have to pay annual tributes of 1-2 bags of cocoa as royalty to the palace household of the chief, on whose tribal lands the farm is situated. Tenant farmers (*abunu*) who have established or co-established cocoa farms on another owner's plot will need to share half their annual cocoa harvest with the land owner. Finally, caretakers of cocoa farms owned and developed by others (*abusa*) will need to give two-thirds of their annual cocoa harvests to their landlords and only keep the last third for themselves. Consequently, for most cocoa farmers, sizeable tributes and expenses (e.g.

fertilizers, pesticides, etc.) have to be paid out every year only in order to maintain their claim of having rightful control over the farm plot as a particularly bounded space, and thereby defend the rights to retain parts of the value generated from the sales of the produce grown there. Therefore, it constitutes a significant burden for smallholder and sharecropping farmers that they need to produce and sell considerable volumes of cocoa before profits can be generated for their own households. According to law and development researcher, Janine Ubink, 80% of land in Ghana is still regulated through customary law (Ubink 2008: 266), indicating a persistently strong dominance exercised by the traditional authorities.

Summing up, the Ghanaian customary approach to both land ownership and sharecropping contracts is based on principles that maintain high degrees of flexibility by leaving numerous aspects loosely defined. The *abunu* and *abusa* types of agreements both operate through general part-whole divisions of future farm produce that do not directly seek to enumerate targeted volumes of cocoa outputs or expected incomes from later sales. Likewise, in many cases the bounds of individual farm plots remain vague, while ownership of the land may reside concurrently with different people. Both of these customary approaches to land rights and farming practices differ profoundly from the legal and general administrative systems otherwise championed by first the colonial and later the national state powers, resulting in Ghana in a particular mixture of traditions regarding management of geographical spaces. Coupled with this, the traditional view also operates with a conceptual distinction between ownership of land itself and ownership of that which grows upon it.



Image 12: A group of farmers are in the process of cracking a pile of harvested cocoa pods. Photo taken on a farm south of the Bia National Park/Resource Reserve. October 2014.

The Labours of Cocoa Farming

Cocoa farming is a characteristically labour intensive undertaking, something I came to learn and feel over several weeks of volunteering as a harvest worker on various family-run cocoa farms across the rural western Sefwi area. The ripe cocoa pods seldom fall from the trees on their own and will need to be cut down one by one with cutlasses or pole-mounted knives. Furthermore, cocoa pods often grow directly from the stems and trunks of the trees, and as the bark of these places can be quite fragile this means that miscuts risk causing the affected areas to wither and in worst case lead to the death of the entire tree. Hence, cocoa farming in general has proven difficult to mechanize and remains a largely manual profession requiring time consuming efforts.

Plant diseases constitute one potential downside to the planting of cloned cocoa trees in a landscape already heavily devoted to this particular monocrop cultivation, but fortunately West Africa

has until now largely escaped diseases such as the witch's broom that had devastated the Brazilian cocoa business in the 1970s. Still, though, a number of pests and diseases persistently threaten the cocoa production of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Nkrapan [mistletoe] thrives on cocoa and branches with such growths need to be cut down, or else the affected trees will gradually lose the ability to bear fruits. Swollen shoot disease is a viral infection that causes swellings of tree stems and smaller fruit pods. Insects called akaté and mealy bugs will bite the growing cocoa pods on the trees, halting the ripening processes. Black pod disease is condition of contagious mouldy rot enabled by too high humidity levels among densely grown cocoa pods and canopies.

The cocoa trees steadily produce flowers from both branches and trunks which become pollinated by insects and subsequently develop into pods. Among those a few grow into voluminous fruit pods that turn into deep yellow or at times red-orange hues as they ripen. Some of the fruit pods growing on the trees at low heights can easily be cut down through the use of machetes. Other pods, though, grow on branches up to about four metres high up in the tree canopy, so those ones the farmers need to harvest with the use of pole-mounted curved blades. Harvesting cocoa pods can be a laborious undertaking, so often the entire farm household helps out with the work. The men typically cut the pods down while the women and children gather them in baskets and bring them over to a designated spot on the farm, where they pile them on the ground in a forest clearing called an *aboyé* in Sefwi. The *aboyé* is typically filled up with pods over a few days of work until it consists of a few hundreds to a few thousands of cocoa pods. Once a sizeable pile has been made the head of the household will call on nearby neighbours, family members, friends, and sometimes hired hands to come and help out with the process of cracking the pods. The inviting farmer will in turn also help the others, and especially in the peak main crop season farmers often go out for several days in a row visiting the farms of their neighbours or other members of their local collaborative farming societies. The process of cracking a pile of cocoa pods takes anywhere from a couple of hours to the major part of a day, depending on the size of the pile and the number of workers. The farmers gather around the *aboyé* in a circle, each sitting on his or her own little wooden stool and with a basket or bucket beside them. Using machetes or cutlasses the farmers open each pod one at a time and scrape out the fresh beans (technically seeds, but beans has become the common term) surrounded by thin creamy-white pulp. There are typically some 20 to 40 beans inside each pod, and all are scraped into baskets while the empty husks are tossed aside on the forest floor.



Image 13: A cluster of pulpy cocoa seeds about to be removed from a freshly opened pod at a rural Sefwi area cocoa farm, October 2014.

Typically the wife of the host farmer will prepare some food and drinks to share with the workers as a form of gratitude for their help. This often takes the form of classical Ghanaian dishes, such as fufu (mashed yam mixed with cassava), kenkey (boiled rice and maize wrapped in banana leaves), jollof rice, or other kinds, supplemented with water or in some cases purchased drinks such as juice or locally manufactured spirits.



Image 14: A pile of freshly extracted cocoa seeds lies ready to be covered with plantain leaves on a farm south of the Bia National Park/Resource Reserve. October 2014.

During the pod-cracking sessions I took part in the hosting farmer would usually walk around among the circle of seated helpers and pick up each of the baskets as they became filled with fresh cocoa seeds. The hosting farmer would then carry these over to another nearby spot where some fresh banana or plantain leaves had been cut and placed in a pattern to cover a flat part of the ground that had beforehand been swept clear of fallen leaves and other materials. There the cocoa is subsequently left to ferment in a pile over the next five to seven days under an outside cover of additional leaves held down with sticks and stones. The fermentation process is done so in order to kill off the sprouting ability of the seeds and to break down the toxins that otherwise give a bitter taste, replacing it with the more rounded taste consumers commonly associate with cocoa. The fermentation works in the way that the deteriorating pulpy juices produce heat upwards of 50°C, while the oxygen-deprived interior of the pile keeps it from rotting (Schwan & Wheals 2004). The farmer will typically check to the pile and stir it every few days to ensure that all the beans ferment equally, and especially so that the innermost beans will not receive too much of the heat generated by the process, and likewise that the surface layers are mixed into the depths of the pile to ferment properly too. During the

fermentation the pile is freely visited by the numerous types of insects living in the forest. Caterpillars, ants, spiders, and others take part in the feast, as do typically too various fungi and moulds, that reveal themselves in splotchy patches of growth on the pile when it is later uncovered.



Image 15: Two farmers are spreading freshly fermented cocoa beans out atop a raised bamboo platform. There the cocoa will remain for about five days to dry in the sunlight, covered with a plastic sheet at night and during rainfalls. Rural Sefwi a few kilometres from the Côte d'Ivoire border, April 2014.

After the farmer estimates that the necessary fermentation process has taken place, the pile is split apart and the odorous, brown slimy beans are placed into baskets again and carried over to drying tables in a nearby sunny clearing typically next to the main farm house. These raised drying tables are most often made in the way that wooden poles are put into the ground and connected with other rafters to form a raised platform about 1 - 1.5 metres above the ground. On these platforms mats of tied together bamboo strips are unfurled which provides a flat surface on which the cocoa can be spread. The drying process takes about 4-7 days depending on the weather and the degree of sunshine and humidity, and during this time the farmer keeps some waterproof canvas strips or plastic bags handy, so that the drying mats and their contents can quickly be rolled together and covered in case of rain or to prevent morning or evening dew from forming on them. After the beans have dried sufficiently the farmer will contact a nearby licenced purchasing clerk in order to proceed with a sale of

the cocoa. The handover point where the farmer and the purchasing clerk seal up the jute bag full of cocoa beans and puts it on his transport vehicle is usually the last moment the farmer sees the physical goods. Cocoa farmers I interviewed were familiar with the subsequent storage conditions of the cocoa at larger rural and coastal depots, but none of them expressed any further interest in the future of the cocoa once they had sold it and received their money in hand.

Tempting Foods beyond the Forest Boundaries

A cocoa pod cracking session typically involves five to ten people sitting around in a circle for a number of hours until the entire gathered pile of pods has been opened and emptied. I joined in on several such events, something which provided ample opportunities for engaging with the farmers and talking with them about matters of their livelihoods, cocoa farming, or simply listening in on the social chatter of the day while we all worked. During one such session on a farm by the very southern edge of the Bia National Park, an old man whom the other farmers simply referred to as ‘Senior’, entertained everyone with jokes and songs poking fun at people from different tribal affiliations in various parts of Ghana. During a lull in this entertainment I asked everyone present what they thought about the protected forest area just beyond their farms. Senior quickly spoke up that it was all too strictly enforced – and continued by saying that years ago he had even experienced being detained for two weeks by forest rangers, just because they happened to find him while he was cooking and eating a tortoise inside the protected area. This comment immediately spurred an outburst of reactions from the rest of the farmers. Some of them laughed loudly at Senior’s story and called it typical for him to get caught up in such an unlucky situation. Meanwhile others shook their heads and complained about the unjustness of government regulations that seemed to care more for the lives of forest animals than for the nation’s own hungry population. The voices around the cocoa pod pile eventually converged again with all the farmers agreeing that, regardless of all, ‘bush meat’ indeed tasted better than meat from domesticated farm animals, but it was too bad that it was largely unavailable these days.

On another occasion I got a chance to talk with the chief of a farmer society also located near the southern edge of the Bia National Park, in a place not far from where the farmer called Senior had told his story. The chief, Mr. Anane, shared with me some of the frustrations felt by himself and his community in their roles as cocoa farmers trying to secure their living next to the official forest park perimeter. According to him, forest elephants from the Bia frequently went foraging on the cocoa

farming plots outside, especially in the relatively dry months between November and March where water resources tended to be scarce inside the reserve. Elephant raids also still occurred well into the early parts of the rainy season between April and June before fruit availability had been fully replenished in the forest. Visits from the elephants typically resulted in toppled over cocoa trees and broken branches as they went about their foraging, and Mr. Anane told me that unless the elephants were disturbed, they would most likely stay around until their bellies were filled and a whole farm plot had been wrecked. The farmers tried to prevent such situations from happening by camping out among their trees during the periods of particular risk and by yelling loudly and beating sticks on the ground whenever they noticed elephants approaching. The farmers couldn't hurt the elephants, the chief emphasized to me, so they instead had to try and scare them off with loud sounds, something which only worked to a limited degree.

As my initial conversation with the society chief came to a close, he added a pensive remark about how I was the third white person over the years to come to this place and ask him about the elephants. He couldn't recall the names of the previous visitors nor the exact years of their visits⁷², but he found it peculiar how “white people” seemed to care so much more about the lives of the elephants than the plight of the farmers suffering these big animals' raids. At first I didn't give much thought to this comment, as my own motivation for coming there had centred on questions of cocoa farming practices and the topic of the elephant raids had emerged rather incidentally during the conversation. However, Mr. Anane's remark still stuck with me later on due to its similarity to the other recent laments of some Senior's peers regarding the Ghanaian government's alleged preference for wildlife over humans. Both of these two accounts seemed to express a desire from the farmers' points of view of becoming acknowledged and protected as stakeholders as well, to have their rights to make a living in this place respected by decision-making stakeholders elsewhere. As it was, the farmers here found themselves in a position where they were expected to respect the sanctity of this manmade nature-culture boundary line when the intended animal beneficiaries of said boundary were not held to the same standard and could transgress it at will whenever tempted by attractive foodstuffs beyond.

In Ghana, I have found that people's trust in their government's ability to solve problems is generally low after more than half a century of post-colonial independence that has been marred by

⁷² I believe that Mr. Anane may likely have referred to researchers from the group of Harich et. al. (2013), who reported drastically increased numbers of conflict incidents between human cocoa farmers and forest elephants, based on 100 interviews conducted across 10 communities surrounding the Bia National Park. Possibly, the reference may have been to Oppong et al., whose work on crop-raiding elephants of Bia were published in 2008.

decades of political turmoil and practices of corruption that according to many Ghanaians are worse today than ever before. Instead, loyalty and trust extend primarily among affinal and religious networks, as well as occasionally to informal or semi-formal small groups of local people who share similar work occupations like for instance cocoa farming. The regular day to day practices of members of these farming groups serve to reproduce what I suggest to term as multiple expressions of spatialized value, one larger one of the group of cocoa farmers, and several smaller ones of individual households, but both of them framed outwardly in contrast to the uncultivated National Park forest as well as other nearby farmers not included in the group. Within the cocoa farmers' society and separate households the shared space for value creation takes the form of a mutual aim to optimize the growth and fruit outputs of the planted cocoa trees, whilst ongoing manual weeding practices coupled with the application of herbicides and pesticides work to keep unwanted outside plant and animal life from encroaching upon the land plots of the group members. Still, the communality of the farming group is ultimately limited insofar as each family household is seen as the primary unit of trust and collaboration. As a Ghanaian proverb goes, "if you do not accompany your uncle to the farm, the boundary (of the farm) will be crooked." (as quoted in van der Geest 1997: 550), meaning that people who do not take care to continuously maintain their claim over a certain space of land suffer the risk that others will gradually encroach upon it. To Mr. Anane and his neighbours, however, their most immanent problem of encroachment has to do neither with opportunistic farmers coming from outside their group nor with the growth of common invasive weeds or insects; rather the problem is the elephant incursions coming from Bia National Park. Unlike the voices of nature conservationists, to the nearby cocoa farmers the sharply enforced (yet unfenced) boundary line towards the National Park represents not a fragile space in need of protection, but rather what appears to be an adversarial space with animals that constantly threaten to encroach upon the spaces of the cocoa farms outside. In other words, each space is constituted by different value expressions, emphasizing human cocoa agriculture business on the one side and a non-human West African original tropical forest biosphere on the other.

With the laments of Mr. Anane and his fellow border zone cocoa farmers in mind I went the 30kms or so north to the official entrance to Bia National Park, hoping to gain another perspective on the situation from the officials working there. Like the cocoa farmers, Mr. Oteng, a Wildlife Ranger in the Bia National Park, also expresses some frustration with the current situation. Both he and his fellow park rangers are repeatedly confronted with the transgressive exploits of especially the inhabitant elephants. Oftentimes nearby farmers come to the park offices to complain about elephant incursions that have left devastated cocoa farms in their wake. The park officials are rarely capable of alleviating these farmers' frustrations, since strict nature preservation laws prohibit either party from performing

actions that may prove harmful to the elephants themselves. As Mr. Oteng explained, the park administration has neither access to funds to compensate the farmers for their losses, nor hope of ever finding the immense resources needed for the building of an elephant-proof fence around the entire 563 km² park and resource reserve. Thus, there is little left for the rangers to offer beyond volunteering in their spare time to help the affected farmers in replanting their toppled cocoa trees with new seedlings.

Additionally, Mr. Oteng added, the foraging raids of the elephants cause ongoing problems inside the park as well, since the dung they drop on the forest floor after their outside excursions often contain live cocoa seeds, which subsequently sprout in their new fertile surroundings. Since cocoa is classified as a non-indigenous plant species – originating in the Amazon – the park rangers have to continually work to uproot such seedlings whenever they find them on their patrols; a quite Sisyphean task given the large area of the park and the density of the tropical forest, combined with the near complete lack of motorable roads and the unrestricted and unmonitored roaming of the elephants. Thus, maintaining the National Park as a distinctly bound categorical entity requires constant human efforts as well. Such activities appear quite paradoxical, however, when compared to the defined purpose of the nature preserve as a place of indigenous nature that retains its particular value by virtue of being perpetually untouched by human interference, in contrast to the surrounding agricultural areas.

The human establishment and insistence on a boundary line that sharply distinguishes the two types of areas enables value to emerge both from subsequently extractable commercial goods as well as value in the form of the preservation of a particular diversity of animal and plant life. The elephants have here been classified by humans as belonging to the second type of category, but these creatures themselves have not limited their movements and eating preferences to fit inside the boundaries of the categorised space thus provided to them. Instead, through their own actions the elephants repeatedly cause frustrations for the people who have attempted to impose such differentiating boundaries of value creation upon this geographical terrain.

The case of the cocoa farmers' woes with crop raiding elephants serve to illustrate how their efforts to maintain and grow their individual cocoa farms and family households are all framed as taking place through persistent opposition against outside forces that otherwise threaten to delimit or defeat their efforts. Through the ongoing encounters with these other entities a boundary becomes reproduced that in turn frames these cocoa farms as particular expressions of spatialized value, different from their surroundings. These boundary-making activities are likewise matched by human efforts from the inside of the Bia National Park border, where forest rangers also seek to maintain the

perceived value of the place through their efforts to mitigate the effects of the excursions by the park elephants, in addition to continuously patrolling the borders of the park to defend it against encroachments by outsiders.



Image 16: At the sharp boundary between farmland and nature preserve. The green foliage visible on the left side of the picture is part of the southern edge of the Bia National Park/Resource Reserve, whereas the area to the right is part of a private cocoa farm. March 2014.

Spiritual Boundaries

To this day the Sefwi area of southwestern Ghana remains rife with the observance of traditional Akan spiritual beliefs, which among other aspects become expressed through local people's ascriptions of names and personalities to landscape features such as rivers and streams. For instance, when travelling between Topman village and the town of Akaatiso the uneven dirt roads twist for several kilometres through a slightly hilly landscape flanked by evergreen cocoa plantations. Along the way travellers will cross a crude log bridge that has been laid down across a small stream. According to

one of my local guides this stream did not yet have a name when the first people came here to establish farms in the late 1970s. To solve this situation the chief of Boinzan at the time sent an oracle to ask the stream what its name was. The oracle performed the proper rites, and when he returned he told the chief that the stream's name was 'Do-or-die'. And so it came to be known as this. Continuing a bit further north along the same road one will cross another smaller stream that locally goes by the name of 'Mpensem', which I was told means "He doesn't want trouble himself", an expression which my local guide did not know the historical origin of, but he suggested that it had to do with the fact that this particular stream was known to be very well behaved since it never caused flooding even in the rainy season. In the opening ethnographic case of the thesis concerning the incident between the Akaatso truck driver and the border official I have already referred briefly to the belief in the spiritual power of the River Bia, the largest river of the region. As a spiritual entity the River Bia is also commonly believed in Sefwi tradition to hold an antagonistic relationship with the other major river of the area, the River Tano, which flows further to the east. The land in the area of least distance between these two rivers is in turn believed to contain high spiritual tension, and superstitious voices around Sefwi warn cocoa farmers to remain careful and alert when farming there.

Belief in spiritual entities inhabiting the environment is commonly encountered in many places across contemporary Ghana, and as I have learned the Sefwi traditional tribal area is no exception to this. Several Ghanaians I have spoken with, locally as well as afar, have even characterized the Sefwi region as rather exceptionally traditionalist when it comes to such matters. Although the majority of the cocoa farming pioneers who settled here decades ago came from other parts of Ghana, they often brought with them similar concepts of deities and religious practices largely identical to those of the Sefwi due to the common Akan cultural heritage shared across most of the southern and central parts of Ghana. Adaption to established Sefwi traditions along with recognition of particular local places of spiritual significance was thus, apparently, merely a small step for many newcomers.

Akan spirituality distinguishes between two basic dimensions of existence, called 'nea wonhu' [that which you do not see] and 'nea wohu' [that which you see], ruled over by the Supreme Being 'Nyankopɔn' who fulfils the role of a kind of overarching third dimension encompassing all of creation (McCaskie 1995; Minkus 1980; Meyerowitz 1951). Many West African agriculturalists, it has furthermore been argued, "generally regard the earth as an indivisible spiritual entity and often explicitly taboo the "showing" of boundaries." (Lentz (2003: 275; see also Fanso 1986: 64). In effect, the concept of boundaries seems primarily to be a matter of separation between material and spiritual dimensions, co-present on the same terrain. Boundary observance, in turn, would be a matter of communication

across from ‘nea wonhu’ to ‘nea wohu’ rather than across geographically differentiated spaces. The powers of the spirits enable them to maintain a dynamic relationship between the physical and the spiritual realms, and to humans the spirits will therefore often manifest themselves materially in earthly places, such as rivers and streams, rocks, or trees (Graveling 2010: 42). Cocoa farmers around rural Western Region of Ghana have frequently built and maintain shrines of sorts somewhere on their farm, something which can take a variety of forms in accordance with regional and tribal backgrounds along with expressions of family traditions or personal preferences. One farmer I interviewed had set a pattern of seashells into a small concrete slab on the ground, at which spot he would offer prayers while pouring libations to the forest spirits. The seashells, he told me, he had brought from the beaches near the home of his family lineage in the Fante areas of the coast to the south. Another farmer I interviewed had built a round stone well-casing in his compound yard (without digging an actual well hole inside it) into which he would from time to time pour libations and offer prayers to the nearby spirits. This form of shrine, the elderly farmer explained to me, he had built to resemble a similar shrine that his father had originally kept on their family’s cocoa farm in the Eastern Region of Ghana, where he himself had grown up in the mid-1950s.

Mr. Anane, one of the elephant-troubled cocoa farmers living next to Bia National Park, is also acutely attentive to the significance of the spirit world and even characterizes himself as a full voodoo priest, a practitioner of obeáh. For this purpose he has built a small shrine on his cocoa farm in a nook formed by the large sheltering roots of a massive kapok tree. At this spot he regularly pours libations, makes small animal sacrifices of chickens or goats and offers prayers to the spirits of the forest and the earth, in order to secure their protection of him, his family, and his farm. This protection also includes protection against potentially envious neighbours who are secretly “backbiters”, as Mr. Anane phrases it, and who would keep secret shrines inside their homes where they make sacrifices to the spirits in order to bring misfortune and diseases upon other people and their cocoa trees. Such malicious deeds Mr. Anane trusts that he can usually ward against by procuring the protection of the spirits at his own shrine. The problem with the invading elephants, though, as he explains, is that these beings are spirits too with their own agendas, and spirits to his view cannot be brought to fight against other spirits, but only to assist people in matters of the material realm [nea wohu]. Discerning the spirit world [nea wonhu] from the material world is not always easy, he adds; some animals are spirited and some are just animals. If you shoot at an animal and it just keeps on going then you will know that it is being controlled by a spirit and cannot be harmed. Another thing complicating the particular issue of the crop raiding elephants, Mr. Anane goes on, is that the Bia elephants are in fact being led into the farmlands by dwarves [mmoatia], half-sized humans that are both men and spirits and who live inside

the forests. As dwarves are considerably smaller than the elephants they are very difficult to see and most often people will only see the crop raiding elephants. Summing up, Mr. Anane states, it is very difficult, and at times impossible, for people to influence or overcome such forest spirits, since these beings are so strong. Barring the possibility of physical action against these spirited elephants or their dwarven shepherds he finds himself in a precarious situation when it comes to defending the boundaries his cocoa farm and his family's livelihood against such outside intrusions.



Image 17: Mr. Anane sits beside his shrine on his cocoa farm near the Bia National Park/Resource Reserve. September 2015.

Mr. Anane and his neighbouring farmers express a different categorization of their surroundings by referring to a distinction between the material and the spiritual realm that supersedes a distinction between what – for instance – nature conservationists may choose to call “pure natural nature” and “human agricultural nature”. Instead, these Ghanaians emphasize the importance of the unseen spiritual dimension that encompasses the forests as well as the farms. With this underlying spiritual realm being vastly more powerful than the material one inhabited by humans, the outcome of any human endeavour will thus remain largely dependent upon either the support – or the indifference – of the spiritual entities. To these cocoa farmers, then, the insistence of wildlife rangers and nature conservationists on the sanctity of the sharply delineated National Park boundary seems mostly pointless, since the spiritual boundaries for permissible human activity follow entirely different

ephemeral thresholds that are not definable as lines in a geographical terrain, but which have to be ascertained on a case-by-case basis, e.g. Mr. Anane's view that some animals and not others are spirited, but that this cannot be known before attempting to shoot them. Going into the National Park forest to hunt or forage is thus not by itself a transgression upon the spirit realm, since the success of any such venture will depend on the benevolence of the spirits – hence the shrine and the prayers and offerings to remain on good terms with them. The elephants along with their dwarven [*mmoatia*]⁷³ shepherds remain highly troublesome to Mr. Anane, though, since their activities are harmful to his material livelihood, while their spiritual provenience keeps them outside the control of both material and other spiritual entities. His shrine serves as a communicative medium, through which he attempts to maintain positive relations with the spirit realm that will permit him and his household to obtain success as cocoa farmers in the material realm. In keeping with the analytical scope of the present thesis, it is my suggestion that this kind of bifurcation of the Akan world into material and spiritual dimensions can be further approached as a form of boundary that distinguishes two different spaces for value creation that at times clash or overlap with those categories borne out of different traditions which insist on the geographically demarcated boundaries between agricultural lands and protected wild nature, as well as on politically founded boundary lines between nations.

Back inside the Bia National Park, the staff also recognizes the importance of the spiritual beliefs shared by many of the region's people of Akan origin. During my visit there the aforementioned forest ranger, Mr. Oteng, guided me to a place at about an hour's walking distance along narrow foot paths from the official entrance at the north-eastern corner. Here the dense tropical forest yielded quite abruptly to lighter bushes and grassy vegetation across a massive, uneven rock formation rising gradually some ten meters from the forest floor and measuring roughly a hundred meters or so in diameter. A few shallow brackwater pools could be found here inside the pockmarked rock, and I noticed dozens of empty bottles scattered around; some of plastic, some of glass, some green, some clear, some whole, some broken. Most of them with their paper labels long since washed off, leaving only the characteristic shapes of the containers as hints that these most likely once held types of locally manufactured alcoholic beverages. Mr. Oteng explained how these rock pools are considered sacred homes to forest spirits according to the local Sefwi lore. Because of this people living outside the

⁷³ Sing. *aboatia*. Also variously referred to as: "the little people of the forest" (Minkus 1980) or "the original denizens of the forest", "fairylike", and "gnomes" (Wilks 1993: 44, 83 n.16). McCaskie reports furthermore that in the Asante understanding *mmoatia* occupy a categorical space somewhere between man and monkey, very small with quicksilver movements, and that they function as messengers between the corporeal and the spirit realm (McCaskie 1995: 119, 300).

National Park area frequently venture here to pour libations and pray for favours from the residing spirits, typically in the hopes of curing illnesses or for assistance ahead of expected challenges in life. The park rangers stationed around here respect this traffic of locals and consider the discarded bottles part of the gift offerings, and thus not something meant for them to remove. Such activities are furthermore tacitly endorsed by the park management, not least since it helps them maintain positive relations with the surrounding communities, and also since the spiritual petitioners share interests with the park staff in the continued preservation of the place⁷⁴. Other types of activities the rangers, however, retaliate strongly against, which include timber logging, hunting of animals, gold prospecting, and gradual boundary encroachments by neighbouring farms. The neighbouring farmers, Mr. Oteng added, are these years largely respecting the geographically delineated limits, but the Bia park rangers still routinely need to make patrols along the outer boundary of the park to keep them all in check.

Considering these materials it appears to me that it would not be tenable with a simple view of this area as comprised of vast cocoa agricultural activities that neatly border a few forest preserves understood as places of ‘pure nature’, encircled yet uncontaminated by and devoid of all human influence. While people and wildlife have continuously interacted in each other’s lives, it would appear that the establishment of the protected forest areas including Bia and Krokosua Hills has instead almost exclusively affected human behaviour, particularly that of nearby farming settlers. The forest elephants of Bia do not outwardly seem to care much about such formal boundaries, and their interactions with the cocoa trees on the outside farms would appear to be characterized more by the elephants’ appreciation of the fruit pods as sources of nutrients, than awareness of neither humans’ private ownership concepts nor of the cocoa tree as a supposedly problematic non-indigenous plant species. From an governmental mapping table in Accra or elsewhere the drawing of boundary lines on a survey chart may have led to some expectations of subsequent clear categorical distinctions, but in the day to day enactments of these boundaries, in meetings between entities used to continuity of the material terrain, practical enactments of opposition, negotiation, or concession are instead taking place. So, while farmers’ planting of cocoa trees and hunting of bush meat were at some point no longer pursuable beyond the official forest boundary line, practical concessions were made for the ongoing worship of spirits believed to reside within. Similarly, while imposing limits on the elephants’ behaviour

⁷⁴ The establishment of formal collaborations between nature conservationist efforts and practitioners of local religious beliefs have in recent decades been advocated as one promising way to protect local West African biospheres, turning sacred groves into pockets of biodiversity preservation amid increasing outside population density (Sarfo-Mensah et al. 2010; Fairhead & Leach 1997; Ntiemoa-Baidu 1995).

to make them conform to regulations remains unrealistic as a practical option, the local officials still do their best to mitigate the effects of the elephants' transgressions, both inside and outside the park.

Characteristically for the population of the Sefwi traditional area is the widespread belief in the existence of an overarching spiritual realm, coupled with traditional Sefwi-Akan approaches to concepts of land ownership and shareholder arrangements. Together this means that the official decrees of ruler-sharp delineations between permitted agricultural and residential lands on the one side and off-bounds protected reserve lands on the other as claimed by the national government remain quite foreign and nonsensical to both indigenous Sefwi and migrant farmers. For a long period of time the various ways of categorizing these forest areas by first colonial and subsequently national government authorities in the distant capital of Accra has only resulted in negligible practical impacts on the everyday lives of the people here. Experts from afar could at times express alarm at witnessing local populations' widespread lack of respect for the borders of officially designated nature preservation zones⁷⁵, but except in those cases where external sources of funding have been found for the physical enforcement of such boundaries, little is seemingly done to maintain their absolute integrity.

In the following section I will now finally turn to look at some of the contemporary efforts undertaken by certain outside actors towards the future transformation of some of these predominant Sefwi region boundaries into differently bounded forms.

Future Boundary Configurations of a Multi-Layered Cocoa Frontier

In the contemporary Sefwi area several forms of activities are pursued by various stakeholders with aims towards changing or developing the shape of the established boundaries along with the activities of the actors within. One such stakeholder is the international NGO, Rainforest Alliance, which since about 2010 has focused a development intervention on the agricultural area situated directly between the Bia National Park/Resource Reserve and the Krokosua Hills Forest Reserve. The NGO has designated this expanse of terrain as a particular 'project landscape' for a four-year nature restoration project undertaken by themselves in collaboration with a commercial agribusiness partner. This project attempts to link up the two nature preserves by way of what

⁷⁵ See for instance Oates (1999: 196), in regard to Ankasa Resource Reserve situated further south in the Western Region of Ghana.

Rainforest Alliance calls a ‘green corridor’ of shade trees and undergrowth through what is currently a mosaic of small farming communities and family households focused almost exclusively on cocoa cultivation⁷⁶. It is hoped that with the support of these farmers in the creation and maintenance of such a corridor wildlife will in the future become able to roam more freely between their habitats in the Bia and the Krokosua forest preserves.



Image 18: The project landscape as defined by the Rainforest Alliance NGO. The farmland inside the yellow encircled area is the target of their development intervention. Picture provided courtesy of Rainforest Alliance Juaboso Office, Ghana, March 2014.

The Rainforest Alliance NGO’s focus is foremost on the greening of the selected environment, but in order to get first financial donors – and then, crucially, the landscape’s farmers on board, they have found it necessary to add economic incentives as well in the form of a certification scheme. In return for the monetary bonus from the certification, the participating farmers will be

⁷⁶ In this regard Rainforest Alliance aligns their efforts with aspects of both local Bia-Krokosua wildlife corridor proposals (Asare et al. 2014) as well as another larger scale proposal to link up the Bia forest area with the Ivorian Bossematié area through the creation of an international wildlife corridor, enabling especially elephants to roam freely between the two forest zones (Parren et al. 2002).

obligated to adhere to a number of requirements for the management and development of their farmlands, including strict control with the use of fertilizers and pesticides, the planting of shade trees, attendance at environmental awareness courses, and firm pledges to abstain from hunting or harming any wildlife on their properties. The organization's deliberate coupling of commercial and environmental ambitions has, however, proved difficult to pursue in practice, and keeping track of all these requirements involves the creation and upkeep of a sizeable body of paperwork. The shelves in the small Rainforest Alliance office in Juaboso were in 2015 bulging with piles of folders documenting both collective farmer societies as well as single households, tracking in total about 2.800 cocoa farmers in the project area, as I was told. The documentation in each of these files is seen as indispensable components for obtaining the official certifications for the cocoa farmers. External auditors will also be called upon every three years to approve - or reapprove - them all. The cocoa beans produced on the project area's certified farms will then go on to be collected and sold on the world market at premium prices via Rainforest Alliance's commercial partner, the licenced cocoa purchasing company, Olam International Ltd. The premium sales price obtained on top of the Ghanaian state's officially fixed minimum price is arranged to be disbursed to the certified farmers as lump sums once per year.

In order to fulfil their ambitions of re-connecting the Bia National Park forest with the Krokosua Hills Forest Reserve by way of a continuity of tall trees the Rainforest Alliance has strived to include in their project as many cocoa farming households as possible from the area in between. However, as one of Rainforest Alliance's staff members in Juaboso told me, the NGO has encountered a particular problem in this regard, since a total of 31 cocoa farms on the Krokosua Hills side of the project are found out to have been established inside the official boundaries of that Forest Reserve. Since the NGO remains unable to obtain a legal mandate to offer project participation to farms that encroach on government lands, they are now in effect forced to preclude these farms from the intervention. Awkwardly, this means that the eastern-most side of the hoped-for green wildlife corridor can only partially connect up to the remaining Krokosua Hills area, even if successful everywhere else. In effect this leaves another thin sliver of inhabited cocoa farmlands in place that again remain caught in a marginalized position outside the purview of authorities, not unlike the previously discussed case of Topman village.

On a couple of occasions I accompanied some of the Rainforest Alliance representatives on their fieldtrips around this area to regularly meet with and monitor the efforts of the cocoa farmers participating in their project. One such trip in 2014 had the purpose of notifying the heads of the local collaborating cocoa farmer societies that the much anticipated disbursements of last season's earned

premiums were now ready to take place a few days later. Unfortunately, what made these news a somewhat mixed affair, was the accompanying detail that these disbursements would consist of significantly smaller amounts of money than anticipated. The contract with Rainforest Alliance's commercial partner only obligated the latter to provide bonus payments for the certified cocoa once it had actually been sold, and despite the fact that the 2013/14 cocoa season registered record demands for cocoa beans across the world market, the demand for the more expensive certified cocoa had instead turned out to be smaller than the actual volumes produced. For this reason, premiums were only ready to be disbursed for 67% of the previous year's harvest as the rest was still held in storage, and furthermore, these premiums would now only amount to 7 GH¢ per 64 kg standard bag rather than the 8-10 GH¢ per bag that had previously been announced. As could be expected, the cocoa farmers expressed disappointment to receive this set of news, and in each of the eight communities we visited on the fieldtrip, the Rainforest Alliance representative needed to spend considerable time explaining the reasons behind the deviation and reassuring the farmers of the organization's sincerity on the matter. Compounding the frustrations of everyone, in only one of the visited communities had all the mandatory certification records been kept properly up to date, and the Rainforest Alliance representative therefore found it necessary to also repeatedly stress that unless the farmers brought their paperwork in order within the next few days, no premium payments would be disbursed to them at all. As we neared the end of this fieldtrip the representative summed up the experiences of our day by telling me that: "I think you can see how the coupling of commercial and environmental ambitions can be a bit of an awkward match. But - I think it is still better than doing nothing".

The Rainforest Alliance NGO has taken an ambitious task on itself by trying to mediate between the many different entities and interests at play within this particular 'landscape', as they have labelled it. Recognizing the problems inherent in the existing sharp categorical delineations between farmland and nature preserves, their believed solution entails a softening of these boundaries through a general 'greening' of the farm areas beyond the forest, as mentioned in the form of a green corridor linking the Bia National Park area up with the Krokosua Hills Forest Reserve. The NGO additionally recognizes the entrenched systemic complexity of land rights in Ghana and works to create maps outlining the exact dimensions of farm plots of their collaborating cocoa farmers, all in order to help these strengthen their positions against potential future boundary disputes or against other contestant claims for rights to the same lands.

Rainforest Alliance, I found, showed high ambitions in their goals of bringing people into collaborations to merge this previously distinctly bounded, yet also contested and fragmented landscape

into one large unified whole for the benefit of animal and plant life of the area – an ambition that concurrently sought to respect both strong interests of commercial agricultural enterprises and traditional spiritual beliefs. However, to me it appears that the Rainforest Alliance NGO’s ambitions of achieving developments beyond the confines of old defensive nature preservation categories has come at the cost of subjugating themselves and their collaborating cocoa farmers to other sets of artificial frameworks with differently configured boundaries; namely those of bureaucratic certification schemes and commercial world market forces. The permitted ranges of activities for the cocoa farmers are consequentially being shifted from primarily local geographical boundaries to other internationally based and largely conceptual ones. The forest plants and wildlife will now increasingly be invited back onto the cocoa farmlands, while the farmers themselves will be self-reporting their farming activities within narrower parameters of freedom, since unlike before these cocoa farmers now also have to devote time and care to maintain paperwork documenting details of their farming efforts, all in exchange for increased financial compensation, the exact amount of which will, however, vary independently of the farmers’ own actions. The negative trade-offs of this pursuit of environmental concerns through commercially oriented certifications schemes are, however complicated, in the words of the Rainforest Alliance representative, “still better than doing nothing”.



Image 19: Cocoa at an advanced stage of drying lies atop a drying mat outside a household in rural Sefwi. Within one to two more days the farmer will consider this cocoa ready for sale. March 2014.

Completing the Circumference of Bounded Spaces in the Cocoa Borderlands

Over the course of this chapter I have explored some of the multiple kinds of boundaries that in various ways enable and delimit the physical and ephemeral dimensions, within which people pursue cocoa production as a meaningful, value-generating occupation. Some contemporarily observable boundaries refer back to historical events, ranging from a mythical past to documented occurrences within recent centuries or decades, while yet others again point forward to attempts to imaginatively redefine the future boundaries of this space. Oftentimes spatially imposed boundary designations have proven partial and contingent; championed by some stakeholders whilst contested by the differently aligned views and actions of others. My point of focus through all of these interplays between possibilities and limitations throughout this region has been the question of cocoa cultivation and how this particular activity has become shaped by all such factors. I find that approaching cocoa, here, as a field of potential, an intentionally under-defined spatialized value expression, sets the basis for an analysis whereby the ranges of meaning and value that cocoa may potentially come to emerge with here, is limited in turn by the boundary impositions of other recognized co-present entities, each vying to affect the same possibility space.

Through the exploration of the historical materials I have found evidence that the establishment of clearly demarcated boundary lines in this region of West Africa has to a large part been an outcome of European ambitions, yet not fully so, since indigenous groups of people have kept organizing themselves through more dynamic and flexible ways. Following Zartman (1965) and Wilks (1993, 1992) these ways might better be characterized as being based on power centres gradually extending into ambiguously influenced frontier marches without any outwardly definable boundary lines. In African borderland studies one key approach has been to distinguish between margins and centres, since African governments have tended to focus their efforts on central nation building and authority, leaving borderland communities in the margins (Coplan 2010:2). Consequently, African borderland populations have been described as responding to their marginal status by reproducing their own cross-border society that does not emphasize the citizenship of either nation (Coplan 2010, Flynn 1997), by some researchers a process also described as ‘micro-regionalism’ (Söderbaum & Taylor 2008). Such micro-regions or cross-border societies, I suggest, may likewise be treated as contemporary forms of ‘marches’ in Zartman’s (1965) use of the term, whereby marginal zones in between other power centres come into shape as smaller power centres of their own. Importantly, such currently emergent

social configurations appear to mirror key principles of social organisation historically ascribed to pre-colonial Africa.

The analysis of the present chapter indicate how the different categories imposed upon the contemporary fieldwork landscape of this ‘final cocoa frontier’ in these rural southwestern borderlands between Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire appear as simultaneously shaped through as well as in spite of European colonial influences. The resultant mixture, I believe, is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the two aforementioned Sefwi-Akan terms of ‘doko’ and ‘twama’ that express different ways of assigning land rights to people. As discussed, ‘doko’ signifies an emergent approach whereby a person receives the right to cultivate land from a specific starting point and proceeding onward in one direction until a certain limitation is met (i.e. a hill or a stream is encountered as in Awanyo’s (1998) account, or in an expanded interpretation, until twenty-one days of travel has been done as in Wilks’ (1993, 1992) accounts⁷⁷). Likewise, the alternate approach of ‘twama’ signifies an encirculation of a specific area within which cultivation can be carried out, a principle that corresponds to the dominant approach to classificatory divisions of African spatial territories pursued by European colonizers, especially from the closing decades of the 19th Century and thereafter.

In contemporary Ghana the legal enshrinement of both colonial and traditional approaches to land rights has perpetuated a situation of ambiguity where set boundary lines remain less than absolute and across time and space have variously taken on appearances of solidity, movability, permeability, or transposition, all depending on the actions or inactions of people observing them. Within my delimited fieldwork area in what is currently classified as the Ghanaian government administrative districts of Juaboso, Bia, Bodi, Sefwi Wiawso, and Dadieso I found it evident how this overall geographical region retains its designation as Ghana’s ‘final cocoa frontier’ at least in part through these classificatory ambiguities, which mean that contestations of land rights can remain chronically unresolved, since the same area of land can remain legally claimed by different actors referring to different authorities. Such contestations make it difficult for this perceived unruly ‘frontier’ to fully transition from imagined unregulated wilderness⁷⁸ and into regulated, civilized, and firmly ordered spaces.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 2, p.63-64 for the historical Asante claim that their kingdom extended out to a radius of 21 days of travel from the centre at Kumasi.

⁷⁸ Again, as in the characterization of ‘frontiers’ according to Tsing (2005), which I have first briefly discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

The previously described three different nature preservation zones situated in this area exemplify three different outcomes from the multiple boundaries and contested spaces encountered here. The large area of the Bia Tawya Forest Reserve showcases how independent land distributions by Sefwi chiefs have enabled whole towns and villages to sprout up within an area that according to the national government still retains a status of Forest Reserve on which no human habitation is permissible. This area today contains little to no original tropical forest cover and has become completely encroached by the activities of cocoa cultivating farmers. In comparison, the Krokosua Hills Forest Reserve has over several decades also been subjected to extensive encroachments of farmlands beyond the officially designated boundary lines, to the point where sections of the original boundaries are now hardly discernible on satellite images let alone from human eye level on the ground (see for instance Gockowski 2011: 31). Continued permission for commercial logging ventures and lax boundary enforcements have served to blur the perception of Krokosua Hills as an area firmly off-limits to private initiatives, and the cumulative effects of uncontested gradual incursions have led to the point where opportunistic cocoa farmers hardly fear repercussions, and where locals openly discuss cases of clandestine logging or gold-mining ventures taking place within these reserve lands. Still, despite all these factors the Krokosua Hills have only become partially overtaken by human extractive commercial activities, and patches of this land remain to this day more or less in the condition stipulated by its original government classification. Finally, in contrast to the former two areas, the Bia National Park has largely retained its originally drawn linear boundary from its date of official establishment in 1974 up until today, something which according to the interviewed park personnel is solely due to their own vigilant patrols, whereby they continually check the integrity of the outer boundary and take action against would-be encroaching farmers, poachers, miners, and loggers.

In effect, the suggestion of this chapter is that the multitude of boundaries imposed upon the cocoa farming landscape of my fieldwork area (itself of course another imposition, this time academically based) gives rise to a multitude of spaces for value creation (for instance a person's specified plot of land meant for cocoa farming, or a National Park to preserve a threatened diversity of animal and plant life, or, a nation state to secure the benefits and sovereignty of the people living within). The many instances where one conceptualized space overlaps or encroaches upon another open up margins of additional opportunities in some cases (for instance, access to cocoa smuggling across border posts or unguarded boundary lines, or, say, deliberate farm encroachments on a forest reserve or a neighbours' lands), or else presented as threats of losses of what one has already made claims to (for instance, the vigilant boundary patrols by Bia park rangers, the public debate calls for government justice against corrupted border protection personnel, or the prayers and pouring of

libations to gain the protection of forest spirits against potentially malignant intrusions on one's farm). At other times, still, the incommensurability arising from differently defined boundaries result in frictions in the forms of frustrations and lack of understandings (for instance, the cocoa farmers' lack of understanding for the strict protection of Bia National Park wildlife, or, the boundary divisions of nations or other territories through the thalwegs of streams or rivers such as the French-British colonial era splitting of the Tano and the Boi Rivers, which in the traditional Sefwi-Akan understanding each constitute indivisible spiritual entities on their own).

In the second chapter of this thesis I discussed how cocoa emerges as a valuable good through its organized movement across boundaries between spaces and how such concepts of spaces emerge concurrently through the rhythms of the work lives of people in the cocoa transport business, along with the boundaries assigned to, as well as perceived and enacted by them. In this third chapter I have proceeded to explore some of the different ways in which cocoa cultivation in the Sefwi region of Ghana can be treated analytically as an emergent spatial value expression, under the enabling and constraining conditions and spatial impositions of other influential factors there, expressed in the form of both material and immaterial boundaries. In the fourth and fifth chapters I shall continue to explore how the creation and accumulation of value across the Ghanaian cocoa frontier can be understood as also taking place through temporal dimensions that represent ambiguities and opportunities comparable to those brought about through the spatial boundaries and marginal spaces discussed here.

CHAPTER 4:
COUNTING ON COCOA:
MIRACULOUS SHORTCUTS TO A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

Up until this point I have explored ways in which Ghanaian cocoa becomes valuable through boundaries in spaces of marginality (Chapter 1), boundaries framing actions of movement (Chapter 2) as well as through different perceptions of boundaries as either static or dynamic forms of impositions upon a landscape (Chapter 3). In the present chapter I will go on to analyse how certain notions of movement towards perceived boundaries between present and future spaces likewise influence the ways in which cocoa attains significance to people living in this region of southwestern Ghana in the early 21st Century. I have here chosen to focus primarily on the frontier town of Bonsu Nkwanta, since this particular place in many ways has come to serve as a sort of central hub for people seeking opportunities in the cocoa business of the westernmost Sefwi area, as well as a base for various institutions thriving on the desires and ingenuity of such people. In the latter half of this chapter, as well as in the next one, I will expand the discussion of this topic to include perspectives towards future-oriented agency as such relates to the Ghanaian cocoa business as a whole.

First, in the cocoa frontier town of Bonsu Nkwanta I had found it remarkable how the churches and the banks are two types of buildings that stand clearly out from the rest. Unlike the mud brick walls and corroded tin roofs characteristic of the hundreds of private dwellings, the churches and banks not only take up much larger spaces but also showcase superior quality in the building materials used and stand with much more finished and well-maintained looks. Furthermore, the constructions of these buildings have typically proceeded through shorter, less interrupted periods of time from start to conclusion due to more ready access to funding and materials, something which often lacks in the local inhabitants' private building endeavours.

In this part of rural southwestern Ghana I have learned that commonly expressed desires among people towards obtaining future material wealth are to large extents also reflected through the many different activities conducted by the numerous churches, banks, traditional spiritualists, as well as by the perennially popular lottery ticket business. The general public here seems to be noticeably preoccupied with questions concerning the various ways in which individuals might become able to move ahead in life and reach personal goals of success, defined by increases in social status and in

material wealth. This public focus likewise connects itself to the ever circulating rumours of cheating and corruption that ostensibly take place throughout the entire Ghanaian cocoa business. Such rumours, in other words, concern the ways in which other people have reputedly made illegal shortcuts that have enabled them to secure their own success in life. The making of creative - albeit illicit - gains from one's involvements in the cocoa business is recognised as one potential way to become successful, whereas other ways typically rely on hopes for turns of events of a more miraculous nature. One thing remained certain to the farmers I spent time with; cocoa cultivation on its own does ultimately not provide anyone with a significant monetary surplus, unless one is already fortunate enough to be among the small elite of the region's very largest cocoa plantation owners. For the ambitious person residing in this place the lack of viable perspectives towards gradually obtaining material wealth through hard honest farm work and a prudent lifestyle instead leaves only two options; either one prays for a divine windfall - or one cheats.

The chapter title of 'Counting on cocoa' is meant as a reference to the centrality of this particular natural good for the continued livelihood and future ambitions of the people of Bonsu Nkwanta, and the way in which the cocoa farming provides not only a recurrent source of monetary income for the households, but also how the cocoa becomes invested with people's hopes and desires to someday achieve a better life; by way of commercial cocoa farming and the grace of God - or through opportunistic individual acts. Cocoa, in other words, stands at the centre of the question of how to close the gap between one's current experience of poverty and one's desires for a wealthier future.

Accordingly, this chapter explores the different ways in which cocoa serves as a tool for people's attempts to secure their livelihoods in the present as well as potentially obtain imagined better future lives. The perspectives enabled by such pursuits, I will argue, entail the application of particular conceptual categories of the future, and in turn various perceived boundaries surrounding a vacuous interim time between a 'now' and an imagined future 'then'. Taking a cue from anthropologist Jane Guyer's term of an 'evacuated near-future' (2007), and works of others, I will propose that notions of evangelical and economical time frames can be seen to intermingle with the seasonal cycles of cocoa farming and individual farmers' hopes and dreams for their own better futures. I will suggest that visual expressions of wealth among the rural churches and banks in my fieldwork area can be understood as characteristics that are reproduced through the continued support of impoverished farmers who live with the experience of a slowly progressing present time, yet yearn to somehow close the 'evacuated' near-future gap separating them from the rewards of a visible, yet perpetually distant wealthier future.



Image 20: The view along the main road towards central Bonsu Nkwanta from the western outskirts of the town. November 2014.

The Cocoa Frontier Town of Bonsu Nkwanta

In 2014 a Bonsu Nkwanta resident told me that a humorous saying heard around this town goes that: “If someone today wants to build a house, that person will first need to cut down some cocoa trees”. This burgeoning rural town is indeed closely surrounded by cocoa plantations in all directions, a visible testament to cocoa’s paramount influence on this region since the initial influx of migrating farmers settled here back around 1970. People still migrate here today in search of income opportunities, either as seasonal or permanent labourers in the cocoa farming business, or increasingly to set up small businesses selling non-farm goods to those already living here (Knudsen 2007, 2010). This still continual increase of the Bonsu Nkwanta town population means that the cocoa farm plots in the immediate vicinity of the town are steadily being converted into household dwelling areas. According to the national population census in 2008 Bonsu Nkwanta had 6.788 inhabitants; a number that the same census estimates would have increased by about 10% come 2011⁷⁹. The popular opinion

⁷⁹ Information courtesy of the Development Planning Office of the District Assembly of Juaboso, 2014.

among people I talked with in Bonsu Nkwanta in 2014 and 2015 was that the number of people living here has kept growing year-over-year for the past several decades, a sentiment not only confirmed by prior census data⁸⁰ but also supported by the many new private housing projects in various degrees of completion that during the time of my own fieldwork could be seen emerging around the outer edges of the town.



Image 21: Former cocoa farming plot now in the process of being converted into a residential area on the outskirts of Bonsu Nkwanta. In the central middle ground a few cut-off cocoa tree stumps can still be seen. Likewise, the two trees closest to the foreground are both cocoa, remnants of the plantation that used to be here. September 2015.

Bonsu Nkwanta is situated some 10kms east of the border to Côte d'Ivoire along the main road transecting the northern part of the former Bia Tawya Forest Reserve area. One reason for this town's rise to prominence as the largest settlement here is its geographical position at a well-trafficked road junction⁸¹ that has made the place a convenient spot for the hosting of weekly local markets and for it to serve as a temporary gathering point and storage hub for cocoa beans transported

⁸⁰ According to the 2002 *Population and Housing Census*, Bonsu Nkwanta had 2,308 inhabitants in the year 2000 – a drastic increase from merely 69 people in 1970, the first recorded year of the town's existence (Ghana Statistical Service 2002).

⁸¹ The word 'nkwanta' in Sefwi and Twi translates literally as 'junction'.

from the surrounding villages and homesteads to the ports. The geographically remote location of Bonsu Nkwanta at one of the outermost tail ends of the Ghanaian cocoa farmlands relative to the country's coastal ports also makes this town a popular place for various private haulage contractors to seek out work, since the long distance places it among the highest-ranking categories when it concerns the amounts of money offered by COCOBOD for cocoa haulage contracts⁸². The number of trucks waiting in line around cocoa depots here seems always quite significant whenever I have spent time in town during fieldworks, although I have so far not managed to find any locals who have felt comfortable about estimating the average number of trucks present on a given day⁸³.

Speaking with recent newcomers, as well as elderly cocoa pioneers, their children, or their grandchildren in and around Bonsu Nkwanta or elsewhere in Sefwi has given me the impression that cocoa farming as an activity rarely, if ever, appears to be a personal passion. Instead, what has motivated most of these people to make their homes and livelihoods here, often far from their ancestral regions, are personal desires for improved wealth and social status, to earn sufficient money to leave poverty behind and to attain more materially pleasant ways of life, either for themselves or else, failing that, for their children and grandchildren. Today, about 45 years after the initial settlement of Bonsu Nkwanta, only few members of the present population seem to have managed to make such a transition. Those few settlers who have prospered considerably are those who had originally arrived early and with sufficient resources to secure themselves large sections of undeveloped forest land and who had family help or could hire farm workers to assist them. Some still live around here, while others have since returned to their home regions or moved to the larger cities of the country and left the daily work on their farms in the hands of caretakers. Such caretakers were typically late-coming migrants who now work the farms through *abusa* sharecropping (earning them one third of the harvested cocoa – see Chapter 3), and who in turn typically hope to be able to obtain their own farms sometime in the future.

Geographers Knudsen & Agergaard have suggested that immigrants coming to Bonsu Nkwanta (along with the neighbouring settlement of Kefass) can be loosely classified according to the following four categories: pioneer settlers (arriving 1966-1979); migrant cocoa farmers (arriving 1980-

⁸² Possibly only the district around Debiso some 50km to the North of Bonsu Nkwanta would be registered as offering higher transport compensation contracts for cocoa, according to insiders in the business.

⁸³ Typical replies I have received included objections based either on large numbers: "Ah! – But they are too many!", or travel frequency: "Who knows - They come and they go all the time!". What remains certain is that the cocoa business in and around Bonsu Nkwanta during these years appears to be absolutely thriving.

1989); cocoa labourers (arriving 1990-1999); and non-farm migrants (arriving 2000-2006) (Knudsen & Agergaard 2015: 331). Over time newly arrived immigrants have encountered steadily increased difficulties of obtaining their own plots of land for cocoa farming, and consequently, as the suggested categories show, later immigrants have been forced to take up less profitable jobs as cocoa farm labourers, or seek their livelihoods in non-farm activities, for instance through various forms of skilled or unskilled labour in the frontier towns. In all, for the majority of migrants who have arrived since approximately the late 1980s, and who have been unable to gain access to cheap farmland from either traditional Sefwi chiefs or other indigenous or early settlement farmers⁸⁴, progress has been difficult.

I gained the impression that to most of the current population of Bonsu Nkwanta the prospect of a wealthier future remains both near and far. The town has been founded within living memory by pioneers seeking their fortunes in cocoa farming, and the ongoing influx of opportunity seeking immigrants mean that an entrepreneurial atmosphere still dominates this place as of 2014-15. Some young people have recently succeeded in establishing business career paths. For instance, Isaac, a young man in his early twenties proudly indicated to me how his own name was now printed beside the Vodafone logo on a signboard atop a small town store in Bonsu Nkwanta. He had recently succeeded in opening his own local franchise shop of the national telecommunications service provider, enabled by his own money savings from years of selling phone credit scratch cards on the town streets combined with investment money from his father, a former pioneering cocoa farmer who had since successfully transitioned into running his own pharmacy in town. Another example is the case of Benny and Tess, two twenty-something year old daughters of the town's largest distributor of bottled beverages, who since mid-2014 have been running their aptly named "BennyTess Lodge", a sizeable appx. 30 room newly constructed guesthouse compound, all financed by their father as a way to set up his daughters with a future source of income.

⁸⁴ Typically such later forms of land acquisition would take place through *abunu* arrangements, whereby the labourer eventually takes over ownership of half the total farm plot area after about three years of cultivating it.



Image 22: The telephone service store recently opened by local young entrepreneur, Isaac Adjei. Bonsu Nkwanta September 2015.



Image 23: BennyTess Lodge in Bonsu Nkwanta. Opened in spring 2014. Pictured here in September 2015.

Meanwhile, many other local youths are less fortunate, as they are unable to rely on family resources to support their ambitions toward specialized educations, jobs and careers, or start-up business ventures. Latif, a teenaged son of a Muslim migrant father from Northern Ghana and a Christian mother native to the Western Region, is among these. The limited income generated by his father's primary job as a cocoa depot worker and his parents' additional work as *abusa* caretakers of a nearby small cocoa farm plot has so far kept Latif from accessing the funds necessary to pay for the business school education in Kumasi that he desires, and for which he, as he told me, had already even passed the admissions test. Instead, Latif struggles to save up money on his own through different small time jobs assisting shopkeepers in town and by helping out friends on their families' cocoa farms. According to Latif he considers himself a Christian, but his upbringing by parents with different religious backgrounds has so far kept him from feeling particular attachments to any one of the town's multiple religious congregations. Unlike him, many of his age-mates devote a lot of their energy and attention to these religious centres, where many of them volunteer in their spare time when not assisting their families with farming or small-scale business work.

All across the contemporary Akan-speaking southern Ghana religion constitutes very important parts of most people's lives, and Bonsu Nkwanta and the general Sefwi traditional area I have found to be no exception from this. With its largely migrant population background this final cocoa frontier area may perhaps even be considered home to a more diverse patchwork of religious observances than most other areas of Ghana. Most communities here host multiple Christian church congregations in addition to at least one mosque and several practitioners of traditional beliefs. Even for non-practicing members of the population the influence of the religious movements is impossible to overlook. Christian families dressed in their finest clothes walk along the streets and roads to and from churches on Sunday mornings and afternoons (and now increasingly also other days of the week, as different churches establish different religious service routines), leaving the town streets largely deserted for several hours at a time and temporarily supplanting the noise of motorized vehicle traffic with the loud sounds of chorus singing and music instruments coming out from the church halls. Mosques meanwhile follow their own daily rhythms, recurrently calling for prayers from loudspeakers mounted atop the minarets.



Image 24: At the central town road junction in Bonsu Nkwanta on a busy market day in September 2015. In the background lies the building of Asawinso Rural Bank Ltd.

In this bustling environment it is easy to witness both poverty and relative wealth. On weekly market days farmers in simple clothes travel to town by foot, with shared taxis, or with trotros, coming in to trade or to buy necessities for use at their villages or hinterland homesteads, necessities such as rice, salt, or farming tools, and also often to charge their cell-phones, if electricity is available in the unstable regional grid⁸⁵. Local government officials, business owners, bank functionaries, church representatives, big farmers, and occasionally traditional community chiefs with their entourages either stop by or pass through in privately owned pick-up trucks, on weekdays as on market days. Many small-scale business owners either operate out of padlocked single-room stores that open up their front doors along the main road through town, or alternatively by setting up their portable shop inventories along the road sides during daytimes.

⁸⁵ For instance, during a 14 day period in early September 2015 I took note of 59 instances of power outages (in Ghana events known as "lights-out" or "dumsor") in the electrical grid servicing Bonsu Nkwanta, each outage lasting between a few minutes and in a few cases entire days. An electrical substation is reportedly approved for construction at Juaboso in order to mitigate the stability problems of this region's worn down and overextended power infrastructure. Still, even the unstable power supply in Bonsu Nkwanta is seen as a boon to market day visitors coming in from surrounding communities with no access to electricity at all. Generator supported individual cell-phone towers likewise mean that telecommunications services can often be maintained through lights-outs.



Image 25: The main road through central Bonsu Nkwanta on a calm day in September 2015.



Image 26: Cell phones being recharged at a roadside stall while their owners attend the weekly market. Bonsu Nkwanta serves as a regional hub in more than one sense. September 2015.



Image 27: Bonsu Nkwanta residential neighbourhood, September 2015.



Image 28: Central Bonsu Nkwanta alley. Example of the commonly occurring soil erosion due to a lack of town sewage pipes to handle precipitation and household waste water. September 2015.

Most town buildings in Bonsu Nkwanta are small tin-roofed compound huts made of wood and mud bricks, interspersed here and there with larger brick-and-mortar constructions that house predominantly local bank branches and church congregations, each with its plastered walls painted in bright combinations of colours. The wealth displayed by the material appearances of these institutions seems in large part to have been enabled through the popular support they each enjoy among members of the population here. The banks conduct a thriving business offering savings and loans services to clients among the town's commercial enterprises along with some cocoa farmers⁸⁶, as well as by enticing all farmers to save their cash or Akuafo cheque⁸⁷ payments for cocoa in the banks. The churches meanwhile collect money donations from the devout members of their congregations, both over the course of each year as well as through intensified donation drives that the churches call 'harvestings', which take place during the peak cocoa production seasons in November to December. In the following section I will look closer at the presence of these institutions as well as the important roles they play for the cocoa farming community of Bonsu Nkwanta and the area around this place.

⁸⁶ As is common not only in Ghanaian commercial banking, offers of loans would be largely dependent on whether potential loan-takers could provide additional security in the form of personal or family property. As a further note, Porter (2002: 290) remarks on a negative correlation between the geographical remoteness of farmers' locations and their abilities to obtain credit with Ghanaian rural banks.

⁸⁷ The Akuafo cheque is a specific type of government-backed payment cheque for cocoa purchases, redeemable for cash at any Ghanaian bank. It was introduced around 1982 as a means to combat corruption in the cocoa business and soon attained a high degree of popularity with farmers, before being pushed largely out again in favour of cash payments following the partial liberalisations of the sector in the 1990s (GhanaWeb September 20th 2012).



Image 29: The approach to Bonsu Nkwanta viewed from the east in September 2015.



Image 30: Billboards next to the Eastern entryway into Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.

A Closer Look at the Churches and Banks

Travellers approaching Bonsu Nkwanta in 2014-15 from the east side along the main countryside road will likely first come to notice how the previously dominant rural landscape of dense green cocoa plantations gives way to a view of first several large cocoa depot buildings belonging to various Licenced Buying Companies (LBCs) operating in the area⁸⁸. Then, one will come to see a dense cluster of private tin-roofed mud brick huts and aerated concrete bricks compounds, next to a single cell phone tower clinging to the hillside. The town itself is sprawled across the hilltop area behind. On the left hillside as one enters the town stand two billboards, one proclaiming the presence of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the other advertising the local branch of the Church of Christ. These churches are two out of the fifteen or so different religious congregations that practice their beliefs in this town, all ranging from Christian and Islamic groups to traditional Akan spiritualism. On the direct opposite side of the road from the two Christian billboards stands another large billboard announcing in bold capital letters that “Bia-Torya Community Bank Welcomes You – Head Office Bonsu Nkwanta”. This rural bank franchise is one out of four financial institutions represented in the town, and it is situated in a colourful green painted new building in the town centre, surrounded by purple-painted concrete pillars upholding a fence of brown painted metal bars, its combined colour scheme thereby granting it a very distinct visual appearance that sets it apart from the other institutions there. One of Bia-Torya Community Bank’s competitors in this town is Midland Savings and Loans Ltd., a rural bank that operates out of a nearby smaller town building painted white atop a dark blue bottom colour along its foundation, this building further characterised by darkened window panes to filter out the harsh sunlight. As of 2015 Midland Savings and Loans Ltd. is also the only bank in town with an ATM machine inset into its outside wall, which accepts local and nationally issued debit cards, a service that however remains subject to the unstable electrical supply of the region. Situated right at the central market junction next to the dusty combined trotro and taxi station is another bank building, the local branch of Asawinso Rural Bank. This bank is housed in a recently completed house with red-painted zinc roof, stained-glass windows and freshly painted light yellow walls. Finally, a few hundred

⁸⁸ In September 2015 I counted a total of 19 cocoa depot buildings situated either in or immediately surrounding Bonsu Nkwanta, all registered as belonging to 14 different LBCs. These depots were marked as representing the following Licenced Buying Companies: PBC (The Produce Buying Company; three depots labelled A+B+C), Armajaro (three depots; A+B+C), Olam, Kuapa Kokoo (two depots; A+B), TransRoyal, RoyCo, Unicom, Sika Apa, Cocoa Merchants, FedCo (Federated Commodities), Akafo Adamfo, Nyonkopa Cocoa, Abrempong Commodities Limited, and Liberty.

metres down the road the local branch of ADB (Agricultural Development Bank) has their characteristic green and white painted building behind a green wooden picket fence surrounding a small courtyard. ADB additionally has an electrically backlit plexi-glass encased company logo sign by the roadside that often shines a prominent yet lonesome greenish light after nightfall, due to the lack of competition from public street lamps or strong private light sources nearby.



Image 31: Bia-Torya Community Bank Ltd. in central Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.



Image 32: Midland Savings and Loans Ltd. Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.



Image 33: Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) in Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.

The only other sizable buildings around the town that seem capable of matching these banks in their size, colourfulness, and quality of construction materials are (apart from the major cocoa depot warehouses of the leading LBCs) those buildings belonging to the churches. For instance, atop the hill and immediately to the right as one enters the town, an ambitious large church building project dominates the view by way of a raw reinforced concrete framework that surrounds an already built much smaller church hall inside. As a signpost on the smaller inner building indicates, this church building project is an expansion of the local branch of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Several other sizeable church halls are dispersed throughout the town, almost each of them painted in vivid colours and with clearly signposted fronts. These religious congregations include names such as The Seventh-Day Adventist Church, The Church of Christ, The Assemblies of God, The Church of Pentecost (very popular here with three different church halls active as of 2015), The Apostolic Church of Ghana, Bethel Methodist Chapel, Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, The Roman-Catholic Church, and an Islamic mosque. In addition to these the town also hosts a bunch of other smaller and less visibly advertised religious groups. The latter includes multiple individual spiritualist practitioners, some adhering to various traditions said to be of purely West African origins, while others declare that they combine their traditional religious practices with powerful aspects of Christian or Islamic religions. According to some residents of Bonsu Nkwanta I spoke with, local distinctions between these spiritualist practitioners include titles of 'Nana' (also a commonly used Ghanaian title of chiefly honour)

or ‘Jujuman’ both for various fetish priests and other traditional spiritualist practitioners, while spiritualists with Islamic leanings are titled ‘Mallams’, and spiritualists with Christian leanings are frequently called ‘Prophets’.



Image 34: Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015: The Church of Pentecost – Bonsu Nkwanta Assembly hall.



Image 35: Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015: The Church of Pentecost – Adamase Central Assembly hall.



Image 36: The Roman Catholic Church of Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.



Image 37: Bethel Methodist Chapel. Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.



Image 38: Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.



Image 39: The Seventh Day Adventist Church Assembly hall. Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.



Image 40: The central town mosque of Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.



Image 41: The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Bonsu Nkwanta. Existing assembly hall stands with an expanded church building construction site initiated around it. September 2015.



Image 42: The Apostolic Church of Ghana building project. Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.



Image 43: The Church of Christ building project. Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.

In addition to the already described religious and banking-sponsored billboards flanking the eastern entryway into Bonsu Nkwanta, further publicly displayed signage could be seen around the town. Along the main road through the town in late 2014 there stood a prominently placed large billboard rising above the nearby rooftops and which featured a colourful picture of two young black children of the kindergarten-attending age coupled with a corporate logo belonging to one of Ghana's large commercial banks and a short text encouraging parents to start saving up money for their children's future educational needs. As an extra incentive this advertisement promised that parents opening savings accounts with this specific bank would become eligible to enter into a lottery drawing where a random contestant would win a genuine solid gold bar – a shiny image of such likewise pictured on the billboard⁸⁹.

At the central town junction in 2014-15, next to a colourful sign again advertising the Bia-Torya Community Bank Ltd, a colourful canvas poster is suspended from a utility pole, showcasing an ad for "Powerful Nana Kwadwo Herbal & Spiritual Center". This poster represents a private practitioner of traditional spiritual remedies who offers to provide people with supernatural aid to their problems. According to the text on the lower part of the poster these remedies could include solutions to: "sickness, travelling, jobs, money, marriage problems, duabo"⁹⁰.

Finally, in Bonsu Nkwanta as in many other communities across Ghana one can also find numerous small wooden concessional stands, each painted in the characteristic red-yellow-green striped pattern, and often with an added black star painted atop the yellow middle part to complete the resemblance to the country's national flag. From such stalls clerks sell lotto coupons and announce the latest winning number combinations, all as part of ongoing nationwide lotto games⁹¹.

⁸⁹ At the time I failed to secure a photograph of this particular billboard. In my fieldnotes I attributed the ad to Fidelity Bank, a large Ghanaian banking company. This bank ran a repeated nationwide ad campaign between 2014-16 with multiple gold bar prizes given out to lucky contestants. Fidelity Bank's official slogan for their campaign was: "Fidelity - Save for Gold Promo: Win a 1kg 24 carat gold bar and change your life!" (Citi 97.3 FM online 2016; Fidelity Bank 2015).

⁹⁰ The full sentence reads: "Come for your spiritual solutions such as sickness, travelling, jobs, money, marriage problems, duabo". The latter word is a Twi term designating acts of cursing. See also photos on the next page as well as the case discussion of one particular curse incident in Akaatso in the introduction chapter of this thesis.

⁹¹ Apart from the state owned national lottery scheme there have for decades also been about ten other privately operating lotto companies in Ghana (see Van der Geest 1997: 542).



Image 44: A lotto coupon seller sits inside his stall in Bonsu Nkwanta. September 2015.



Image 45: Central Bonsu Nkwanta advertisements: Bia-Torya Community Bank Ltd. green framed sign post on the central left and spiritualist Nana Kwadwo canvas banner ad on the right. September 2015.



Image 46: Enhanced image of spiritualist Nana Kwadwo's canvas ad. The image collage appears to depict the spiritualist practitioner himself dressed in white in the centre with piles of cash notes stacked in front of him and surrounded by illustrations of two Hindu deities to his upper left and right as well as four Ghanaian men wearing ritual face paints. The man on the left wears a traditional North Ghanaian smog coat, while one of the men on the right wears a Pentecostal style church robe. Bonsu Nkwanta, September 2015.

The ubiquitous usage of public commercial signage and specific colour combinations on buildings is a method commonly used by the religious groups, banks, lotto sellers, along with the LBCs around Bonsu Nkwanta⁹² that enable each party to stand apart from their peers or competitors in visually prominent ways. Not least the many Pentecostal-charismatic churches have in this manner proven themselves very well suited for the contemporary climate of millennial capitalism, as argued by Comaroff & Comaroff (2000) and Meyer (2007). I will suggest, though, that such attention drawing material displays indicate further commonalities between the commercial and religious entities that go well beyond parallel adaptations towards increasingly capitalistic preferences across societies, let alone beyond simple mutual appreciations of the benefits of clear branding. Also characteristic for all of them is their focus on future material gains that they each outline in the shape of enticing potential rewards

⁹² Also a method of visual recognisability used throughout the rest of the nation, to be precise.

that may be obtained by lucky individuals among their supporters. These perspectives are explicitly stated in some cases, such as the previously described bank billboard's gold bar prize, the national lottery service, or as in the case of the town spiritualist who amongst other services offers ritual aid for clients' money problems⁹³. The churches of Bonsu Nkwanta likewise share a comparable focus on prospective material gains that may become obtainable to fortunate members of their clientele by way of divine bestowments.

In the academic literature it has been argued that a common denominator among modern African Pentecostal churches is exactly this kind of preferential attention paid to this-worldly material matters over those concerning the afterlife (Meyer 2015, 2004; Gifford 2015). In the words of professor of Religious Studies, Paul Gifford, "All Africa's Pentecostal churches originate from the same idea: a Christian is destined for victory in every aspect of life, which includes material prosperity." (Gifford 2015: 29)⁹⁴. However, what might commonly prevent such a personal destiny from materialising is interference from external spiritual forces, which in turn can be defeated through proper religious devotion (ibid). While the Catholic Church through history has already established a precedent for obtaining and holding material property, the Pentecostal Christian movements that have emerged during the 20th Century and rapidly spread across Africa also reflect this institutional tradition, while concurrently promising their believers potential rewards that can be obtainable already in this life rather than solely after death: "Your miracle is on its way", as a popular slogan goes among African Pentecostal churches, according to Meyer (2004: 460). The outward expressions of material wealth shown both through the physical church facilities as well as the personal appearances of their main pastors, and all financed by the support of the believers, should, according to Gifford (2015: 9), be considered instantiations of the same form of clientelism that is already recognized as highly characteristic for African politics. For examples of such clientelism in religious settings Gifford refers,

⁹³ 'Money rituals' – the supernatural conjuration of physical money - is a commonly known concept across Ghana and advertised by spiritual practitioners on roadside billboards, in newspaper ads, and even through commercial television spots. I spoke with several cocoa farmers who swore to such rituals' effectiveness – although they also cautioned that long-term negative effects exceeding the immediate positive gains should be expected as the ultimate outcome of all such spiritual dabbling, and responsible persons should therefore know to stay away.

⁹⁴ To note, Gifford specifies his deliberate use of "Pentecostalism" as a collective term for most non-Catholic denominations of Christianity encountered in Africa (ibid:6). His quoted argument is therefore not limited to The Church of Pentecost per se, but related to an overall tendency shared among emergent Twentieth Century Christian movements across the African continent. Meyer (2004) instead refers to 'Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches' as a collective term for the same.

among other sources, to the work of anthropologist Katrien Pype, who has explored relations among *pasteurs* and their followers in Kinshasa, the capital of The Democratic Republic of Congo. Pype writes that: “The pastor is the ultimate ‘strong man’ in contemporary Kinshasa. *Pasteurs* acquire material goods such as cell phones, luxurious cars and designer clothes from their followers and show off their opulence in public, and semi-public spaces. The wealthier the pastor, the more he is believed to be in touch with God since his life of luxury is due to gifts of appreciation from satisfied followers” (Pype 2012: 80). Similarly, in the setting of Southern Ghana, sociologist Karen Lauterbach has researched young people’s pursuits of Pentecostal pastorship as career choices. Lauterbach finds that such aspirations entail both personal desires of ascending religious as well as social hierarchies, along with desires towards becoming a ‘big man’ through the gradually increased access to the accumulation and redistribution of wealth through the activities of the church networks (Lauterbach 2010, 2008). For a recent comment nuancing the degree of desirability and approval of Ghanaian Pentecostal pastorship, though, anthropologist Girish Daswani has pointed to the public voicings of scepticism and ethical critique aimed at the ‘characters’ of pastors who appear to focus more on their own attainment of power than on the good of their followers (Daswani 2015). Similarly, Meyer has discussed how Ghanaian Pentecostal churches find themselves continuously grappling with maintenance of the proper balance between superficiality and depth (Meyer 2015, 2006), an issue which in popular video-movies has also been exemplified through the common trope of born-again pastors lead astray by power and wealth (Meyer 2004). Such concerns over excessive accumulation and consumption furthermore link Pentecostals with practices and imaginaries of contemporary Akan witchcraft, through which similar types of critique are being expressed (Parish 1999).

Still, displays of power by those in office follow a well-established tradition. As described by McCaskie (1995), traditional Asante chiefs in Ghana also frequently rely on public performances of stately wealth to reproduce their power. These indications that wealth attracts wealth also resonate with theorizations by Graeber through the terms of ‘action’ and ‘reflection’, based on his ethnographic materials from Madagascar (2001). There, according to Graeber, public displays of wealth by tribal chiefs serve to attract more of the same through donations from their subjects. The wealth generated thus comes about through combinations of the chiefs’ actions towards others, combined with other people’s reflections regarding the chiefs’ physical appearances and behaviours, which thereby function as prescriptions for how the chiefs expect other people to treat them in turn. In effect, Graeber argues that these authority figures dress and act like wealthy persons in order to make others continually treat them as such. All these materials, I believe, provide a potential explanation of the reasons for the

remarkable material wealth openly showcased by banks and bank managers, as well as churches and church leaders in Bonsu Nkwanta. By expressing the successful accumulation of money and imported material goods these institutions and their leading representatives craft their own images of success while concurrently holding out enticing prospects to would-be followers. These prospects are based on the idea that by supporting these institutions one gains the chance to personally obtain part of this wealth too. As faithful followers continuously donate parts of their small incomes and volunteer their services in support of these institutions, they also contribute towards even further accumulations of such wealth and expressions of material success. Additionally, the pooled funds and resources of devout followers often enable sizeable investments to be made in the name of the institution, providing still more tangible signs of success. For instance, in the district capital of Juaboso, about one hour's drive from Bonsu Nkwanta, the Church of Pentecost has a few years ago successfully established its own commercial potable water factory, paid for through donations by its followers. This way the local branch of the church is now marketing and selling its own brand of purified satchel water to people of the area, thereby earning additional income for the church's other activities. This case, to my view, also exemplifies how churches and banks of this Ghanaian region to a wide degree express strikingly similar methods of channelling their economic resources into investments in commercially viable enterprises, a point which again corroborates the findings of Gifford, Meyer, Pype, and Lauterbach regarding the strong materialistic leanings of contemporary African Pentecostal churches. Beyond this point, I find further similarities in the temporal aspects of the relationships between Bonsu Nkwanta's primarily cocoa farming population and the town's churches and banks, which I will now go on to discuss in the following.

A Wealthy Future both Near and Far

The prospects of obtaining future material wealth among people of Bonsu Nkwanta, young as old, appears both immanently close while also often elusively far. Examples of individuals' and institutions' extraordinary successes and public expressions of material wealth both contrast and intermingle with the efforts of many people here to secure themselves and their dependants a basic way of living. According to Meyer's research in contemporary south-eastern Ghana, "Pentecostalist churches cannot offer efficient remedies against economic misery on a large scale and most members definitely are not rich. Rather, Pentecostalism provides an imaginary space in which people may address

their longing for a modern, individual and prosperous way of life” (Meyer 2003 [1999]: 163). Thus, people’s day-to-day struggles in the present coupled with desires for a wealthier future seem to leave questions of the interim – the near future – as a sort of vaguely bounded imaginary space.

Characteristic for my own conversations with entrepreneurially minded yet resource lacking people in Bonsu Nkwanta (as well as elsewhere throughout the Sefwi area) is that hardly any of such people have expressed any clear plans as to exactly how or by when they expect to be able to obtain that material wealth that they so strongly desire. Instead, the peculiar way in which their views of the near future remain dominated by the unknown has led me to look at one particular theorisation made by Jane Guyer.

Guyer argues in a 2007 article that she finds a certain temporal shift has taken place in the contemporary public culture of the United States, which mirrors changes she has witnessed in Nigeria in the 1990s. In both cases she finds that the rhetoric of the governmental economic policies is increasingly being oriented towards concepts of long-term growth that leave little leeway for reasoning in the short run. Guyer calls this apparent shift an “evacuation of the near future” (Guyer 2007: 409), a tendency which she finds most vividly expressed through the contemporary rhetoric of macroeconomic monetarism as well as Christian evangelical teachings. Both of these perspectives on society emphasize long-term goals placed in a distant undefined future, to be approached by the submission of the individual to certain frameworks of perception and certain ways of living in the present as well as the near future. In Guyer’s terms this evacuation of the near-future does however not empty that zone of meaning, since it is instead being re-inhabited by a kind of punctuated, dated time (ibid: 409, 417). She argues that although the general shift towards long-term future goals leaves people with fewer possibilities for reasoning about their decisions in the short term, their decision-making is instead becoming based around responses to punctuated events (ibid: 416).

The long-term nature of the goals shared among many people on the Ghanaian cocoa frontier, I believe, corresponds quite well with the concept of an evacuated, punctuated near-future presented by Guyer. The rural banks and the churches of Bonsu Nkwanta offer images of a materially wealthier future, purportedly attainable by their supporters through each individual’s adherence to certain forms of behaviour that include recurrent relinquishing of money in the present. Each Sunday service donation or instance of a money deposit at a bank can thus be interpreted as a punctuating moment, one of a series of stepping-stones, so to speak, towards a desired end-goal, the exact distance to which, however, remains perpetually unclear to the majority of those people striving for it. Likewise, the continued acts of giving parts of one’s limited surplus wealth to bankers or pastors who already

display abundant material possessions may in this perspective go beyond Pype's argument that such people's wealth serve as confirmation of connectedness to a higher entity (God, in case of Pype's informants as well as the Ghanaian churchgoers, and the non-local financial markets to the Ghanaian bank clients). Following Guyer, there would likely be a temporal aspect at stake here too – whereby repeated donations to people who outwardly display that they have personally managed to close the gap between the experience of poverty in the present and a desired wealthier future, effectively serve to enhance each follower's feeling of personal connectedness to such a better future, a sense of approaching one's goals through affiliation with others who have already achieved the same.

I will here furthermore like to point out how anthropologist Nancy Munn's (1986) concept of 'intersubjective space-time' – of giving resources away as a way to enhance one's personal space-time – in the case of these Ghanaian bank savings and church donations, can similarly be interpreted to serve as methods by which individuals attempt to speed up their perceived passage through such an 'evacuated', emptied near-future and thereby approach the achievement of their envisioned ulterior goals. Munn notes how, on the Pacific island of Gawa, people view acts of sharing one's resources as not only laudable, but also as ways of energizing and expanding one's time, whereas the opposite trait, of consuming or saving resources for oneself leads to laziness and contraction of one's time. The ultimate aim of the idealised expansion of self through the connectedness to the surroundings is expressed as 'fame'; to have others you don't know of still know of you. In a sense, this means to expand your own existence beyond your own personal horizon of awareness. Certain materials, *kula* in Munn's ethnography, are particularly suitable for such ambitions, since some of these items may be recognisable heirlooms and famous of their own, and by obtaining these and adorning yourself with these for a while may serve to entangle your own personal network and history with those of the items, in effect enhancing your own fame, and thus expanding your space-time. I find it furthermore relevant to compare this ideal of growing connectedness, of expanding oneself into the world, to the work of anthropologists John and Joan Comaroff on notions of selfhood among the Tswana people in colonial South Africa (2001). Again, similarly to Munn's materials from Gawa, ideals of high personal connectivity and networking with others are found prevalent in Tswana society, and together these materials indicate that in certain settings across the world there are examples where people do not make the same foundational emphasis on the conceptual separateness of the individual from his or her surroundings, as has been the case in most post-Heraclitean Western philosophical traditions and societies. Instead, the boundaries that differentiate any individual from their surroundings do not appear rigidly framed by the person's own physical body, but fluctuate in spatio-

temporal dimensions through the agency of that actor and the boundaries actualized through the relations between them and others.

If time and space are not treated as universally pre-given external dimensions to human life, despite our many mechanical systems created in order to objectively measure them as such, then my suggestion is the following: That the ultimate value of gift giving among people in Ghana, as on Gawa, constitutes the way in which gift giving acts entangle each individual materially and socially with other individuals, and in turn with the entanglements of those others with others yet again, thereby decreasing the perceived spatio-temporal distances between the valuable resources, objects, or forms of social recognition an individual may desire to experience in their life, yet do not currently have access to. By giving resources away one extends themselves outward in space and time, in other words, reducing the experience of relative distance and duration between one's own conditions of life in the present and that future livelihood which one wants to achieve. In this perspective, in my analysis, donations to churches, participation in bank prize drawings, and purchases of lotto coupons all aim towards hopes of rapidly reducing the spatio-temporal distance between current poverty and future wealth.

Cyclicity and Progression

The unilinear progression of time according to European time reckoning traditions and the personal lifetimes of individuals are both accompanied by and to some degrees contrasted by cocoa farming as a largely cyclical endeavour. Although the tropical climate permits some level of ongoing harvests of fruits over the course of each year, there is still a recognisable main crop season running from October to March and a so-called light crop season running from June to August, the latter which follows the onset of the rainy season throughout the country, which starts in March to April⁹⁵. The designation of crop seasons demonstrates how cocoa trees follow their own cycles too, annually as well as over the course of decades. Common knowledge in Ghana holds that cocoa seedlings normally require about five to seven years of growth before first bearing fruit⁹⁶. On the other end of the scale, at

⁹⁵ However, citing "climate change", several Sefwi cocoa farmers have informed me that the onsets and endings of these seasons are no longer as predictable as they were a decade or longer ago.

⁹⁶ A time period that through ongoing human attempts at optimizations for shorter growth periods has now been reduced to about three years for the latest types of cloned hybrid trees promoted by the Ghanaian government. See chapter 3.

about thirty to thirty-five years of age⁹⁷ the fruit outputs of most cocoa trees will have declined to a point where they are typically replaced with new ones, either directly or after the cocoa farm plot has lain fallow for a number years to enable the soil to recover lost nutrients – yet another cycle⁹⁸.

People who make their livelihood as cocoa farmers experience these cyclical conditions of their environment, which entail repeated peaks and lows in the necessary work tasks and their availability of income from cocoa sales. To most of the farmers I talked with, this awareness seems coupled with an awareness of another cycle; that of the human life and of successive family generations. Overwhelmingly, my talks with farmers on the topic of cocoa as a way of living turned to the topic of cocoa farming as a way towards a different future – if not for one self, then for one's children or grandchildren. Here, time appears again as unidirectional progression which lends a larger purpose to the efforts of the individual person or household across the consecutive cycles of farming seasons. Work is done to not only ensure survival in the present, but also to accumulate different kinds of wealth in the hope of attaining better future living conditions. This ambition typically entails that surplus income from the agricultural activities is reinvested the children's schooling, agrochemicals for the benefit of next season's harvests, in the purchase of additional plots of farmlands, or used as remittances to help family households elsewhere. Furthermore, as mentioned, among many religious cocoa farmers substantial amounts of income from cocoa farming also tend to be donated to their local church congregations. In Bonsu Nkwanta, the annually recurrent donation drives by several churches, their 'harvestings' as they term them, are deliberately timed to coincide with the peaks of the main crop season of each year around late November to December where farmers harvest and sell off the largest volumes of their cocoa, and, accordingly, where such farmers also have the largest amounts of cash in their hands. Outside of this hectic season, small-scale business activities across Ghana's southwestern cocoa cultivating areas gradually decrease, as farmers eventually run out of disposable cash. As the owner of a drinking spot in Juaboso lamented to me in March 2014, his business was very slow at this time, since "Nobody has any money now". He went on to add that I should come back to visit him again in November that same year, since he expected that his place by then once more would be full of drinking and celebrating cocoa farmers each with wads of harvest money in their hands.

⁹⁷ As a note, repeated use of fertilizers could extend this time frame by several years.

⁹⁸ Each Ghanaian smallholder farm is traditionally considered to internally consist of two to three alternating parts, i.e. the part currently under cultivation (*afuma*), the part currently under fallow (*mfufuma*), and occasionally also a part left long-term "barren fallow" (*mfufuma-nini*). See Wilks 1993: 44-46).

For some cocoa farmers, especially young or middle-aged males with few or no family dependants, this brief possibility for lavish expenditure, fuelled by the increased outside cash flows into the rural communities, appears like an annually anticipated goal on its own. In both Juaboso and Bonsu Nkwanta people recounted to me how these towns surge with travelling merchants, seasonal labourers, and other opportunity seeking strangers during the main crop season each year. In Juaboso, a local man even related to me how the money from the sale of one single full bag of cocoa (64 kg) would be enough to convince women of a certain disposition to cook for and bed a farmer for a whole week. Whereas some cocoa farmers (seasonal labourers, tenant caretakers, as well as land owners) in various ways seem to give up on long term ambitions of continual wealth accumulation in favour of recurrent short term pleasures, the cyclicity of life in the form of seasonal workloads, income opportunities, commercial expenditure options, the presence of strangers, and the intensity of social events, remain experiences evident to all.



Image 47: “To be a man is not a day job”. Idiom painted on a signpost by the roadside in front of a small private cocoa farming household a few kilometres outside of Bonsu Nkwanta. October 2014.

This cyclicity of cocoa farming seems especially difficult to young men desiring to pursue traditionally lauded Ghanaian life goals of entering marriage, having children, and becoming the head of a household and its primary provider. Not only does the present lack of available undeveloped

farmland force most of such young people into lower paid income positions as caretakers (abusa) of other older farmers' existing cocoa plots, but furthermore do the prolonged periods of the year without significant monetary income opportunities make it more difficult to manage and save up for future investments. These near constant financial worries coupled with traditional norms that expect Ghanaian men to be the bread winners lend credence to the idiom that "To be a man is not a day job", an expression similarly used in Nigeria (see Jordan Smith 2017). As a consequence of the poor prospects towards monetary income and property ownership, many young Ghanaians born in these rural areas look to the cities instead for their future opportunities. The low attractiveness of cocoa farming as a livelihood is a concern shared as well by several high level cocoa business stakeholders inside Ghana as well as internationally. For instance, at the World Cocoa Conference in Amsterdam in June 2014, which formed part of my fieldwork, this concern was emphasized not only in the presentations by the Ghanaian COCOBOD delegation, but it was also an issue repeated by representatives from other cocoa producing nations, NGOs, and agricultural produce companies. The latter included among others representative of Barry Callebaut Group and former Chairman of the World Cocoa Foundation (WCF), Mr. Nicko Debenham, who in his keynote speech referred to recent research data that had shown him that "not one out of 250 children asked wanted to be a cocoa farmer – although one did say he would like to do it – as a hobby".

The requirements of hard labour and widely acknowledged difficulties faced by small scale cocoa farmers and workers towards accumulating surplus income means that, consequently, cocoa farming to many contemporary Ghanaian youths appears largely as a profession to avoid rather than pursue (Vigneri 2007). Here, again, I will suggest that a reference to Lefebvre's 'rhythmanalysis'⁹⁹ term is pertinent, since an aspect of rhythms is how such revolve around repeated returns to an initial outset, to variations within a limited range, the repetition, rather than the progression. Herein I think lies a hint as well of the despair and the sense of tragedy felt among many aging small-scale cocoa farmers in Ghana along with many African youths in general (including many who in a sole reckoning of years of age would already hardly count as youths anymore – e.g. persons in their late thirties to mid-late forties¹⁰⁰). According to sociologist Jordanna Matlon (2015) for young men in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, the category of 'youth' – the time between childhood and adulthood – has similarly come to represent a

⁹⁹ See Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁰ See for instance Langevang (2004) for an analysis of the life conditions of Ghanaian males feeling stuck in youth in an Accra suburb. For a related discussion of contemporary tensions between Ghanaian youth status and transitions into adulthood, see also Amanor (2001: 116-17).

“temporal borderland”, a place where according to one of her informants: “one does not *live*, one *survives*” (Matlon 2015: 151, original emphasis). In Côte d’Ivoire as in Ghana such sentiments are characterized by frustrations caused by absent experiences of progress, sensations of feeling perpetually stuck in a repetitive present moment and unable to generate and accumulate enough surplus income to move forward in life and to obtain access to the social status and material goods, which for generations have stood as milestone indicators of successful transitions to adulthood: family, material property, and steady income generating work.

These conditions of rhythms, movement in circles or on the spot, as my argument goes, may furthermore be considered as closely linked with the widespread public support shown for the churches, the thriving businesses of banks, juumen, mallams, prophets, and other spiritual mediums, along with the perennial popularity of lotto games as well. Motivating this support are profound desires for experiences of radical positive change in one’s personal life; hopes for near instantaneous advancement by help of outside forces into a better future life condition; a future which one’s own actions and rhythms in the everyday life have hitherto proven unable to achieve, let alone meaningfully advance one towards. Hence, I suggest, the material wealth displayed by the many churches and banks in Bonsu Nkwanta; their displays represent promises of what they claim themselves capable of delivering to their truly devoted supporters. Under such conditions where options for stepwise advancements to a desired betterment remain elusively hidden from view, the vying for a miraculous instantaneous reward presents an alluring alternative.

The perspectives evoked by these institutions, whether religious or economic, are rife with fuzzily defined dimensions. Although their end goals may appear clear on one level – heavenly salvation on the Judgment Day – or personal economical wealth and freedom in your own future lifetime – the time interval in between remains characteristically oblique, and those persons recognised as having been materially rewarded in this life appear to have been so largely through circumstances of fateful luck, divine blessings, or quick-witted exploitations of fleeting opportunities. In this Ghanaian case, by following Guyer’s (2007) terms, I find that the obscured pathways from poverty to wealth not only leaves the experiences of the interim near-future zone remarkably evacuated of reasoned meaning, but in addition to the short-term punctuated events replacing larger linear progression (i.e. regular acts of praying, attending religious services, or of saving, investing, gambling, or donating resources) the blurry void in between poverty and wealth appears easily ascribable with notions of mysticism, secrecy, trickery, or cheating.

These concealed aspects are what I will finally turn to in the next chapter. While the material wealth and success displayed by the Sefwi region's churches, banks, spiritualists, and lotto games all deal with prospective instantaneous rewards that may become obtainable through ludic or supernatural forces, another potentially viable pathway for someone to quickly experience success and amass material wealth involves individual agency in the form of practices of cheating.

CHAPTER 5:

WEALTH THROUGH LEAPS AND BOUNDS:

COCOA, CHEATING AND CORRUPTION

“In Ghana, everywhere you go; corrupt, corrupt, corrupt!”

- Depot Boy in Juaboso, March 2014

“Everything about cocoa is cheating. You see, even Tetteh Quarshie, the first farmer, he stole the beans from a village on Fernando Po and took them to Ghana. Cheating is there in all of our history.”

- Former cocoa merchant in Sefwi Wiawso, March 2014

It is a commonly known story in Ghana how cocoa was reputedly first brought there a long time ago by Tetteh Quarshie, a man native to the inland area of Accra, who brought the seeds with him on his return from a journey to the island of Fernando Po in the Bay of Guinea¹⁰¹. Tetteh Quarshie is often recognised in historical and popular literature as the progenitor of cocoa cultivation in the area that is Ghana today. However, the coupling of the historical figure of Tetteh Quarshie with practices of ‘cheating’ is one I have only encountered during my fieldwork conversations with Ghanaians. Although the Ghanaian cocoa business remains thoroughly regulated through the state monopoly on exports, rigorous quality controls, and officially fixed domestic purchase prices, actors within the national market still find creative ways of making additional, unregistered monetary profits for themselves.

People I spoke with during my 2014-15 fieldworks used a number of different expressions to describe the general ways in which people across the nation seek to create special advantages for themselves. ‘Corruption’ and ‘cheating’ are two commonly used terms in this regard, but I have soon learned that the moral and ethical implications of actions referred to by such overall labels are not all that easy to infer. Coupled with other terms and concepts regarding acts of business dealings

¹⁰¹ Specifically, according to information at the Tetteh Quarshie Cocoa Farm Museum situated today at Akwapim-Mampong, Tetteh Quarshie brought and planted the cocoa seeds on his return in 1879.

and interpersonal relations¹⁰², the immorality of such extra-legal activities cannot automatically be presumed beforehand but often requires additional information to ascertain.

Anthropologist Jennifer Hasty has addressed the topic of corruption as it has been expressed through Ghanaian public media discourses around the turn of the millennium (Hasty 2005). By focusing on newspaper journalism in particular, Hasty points to a tendency among Ghanaian journalists to use metaphors likening the total resources of society to food on a household table or alternatively as the blood flow inside a human body. Perpetrators of corrupt activities are in these forms of imageries described as someone who consumes or leeches more than their fair share of the total goods of society. Consequently, Ghanaian media would at times describe successful anticorruption interventions as acts that force the guilty perpetrators to ‘vomit’ back up the funds they have illegally taken (ibid: 275). Similarly, where the circulation of money through society is compared to a blood flow through a body, Hasty finds that in the case of anticorruption efforts: “informal transactions of money are understood not as blood flow through the sociopolitical body but as blood loss streaming from it. Thus, government offices and businesses riven with corruption are said to be “haemorrhaging”, while those responsible may be portrayed as vampires” (ibid: 278). Hasty builds parts of her analysis on the work of political scientist Jean-François Bayart, who has characterised the political logics of post-colonial African states as “the politics of the belly” (Bayart 1993 [1989]). According to Bayart, a shared logic of consumption links the day-to-day struggles of the African poor with the kleptocratic tendencies among the continent’s wealthy elites. Effectively, acts of eating come to occupy a range of meaning from nourishment for survival at one end to overeating, becoming fat, exploiting, accumulating, and attacking or killing by witchcraft at the extreme other end (ibid: 269-270). Where precisely any individual act of cheating or instance of corruption would seem to fall on such a scale appears therefore to be very much a matter of the voracity and greediness with which others perceive the perpetrator in question to have done so. In this type of metaphoric imagery where the total amount of resources of society is imagined as a shared household meal, small-scale acts of taking extra resources for oneself can easily become construed as a reasonable and fair matter of merely securing one’s own rightful portion of food before other more gluttonous table companions would otherwise take it. Likewise, through the imagery of a society’s money and resources likened to a blood flow inside a national body, small-scale acts of leeching can become justified as merely a personal survival strategy, since greedy vampiric others already work to suck the whole of society dry. Hasty sums up this issue succinctly as

¹⁰² Such as ‘kick-backs’, ‘facilitation payments’, ‘petty corruption’, ‘grand corruption’, ‘top-offs’, ‘tributes’, ‘gifts’, and ‘dashes’.

she writes that: “Corruption is not understood by Ghanaians to be a problem of self-centered alienation and withdrawal from social relations of trust but a problem of hyperengagement in vital socio-political flows of desire and affect as well as materiality. [...] Perpetrators of corruption are thus not selfish, immoral sociopaths, but extroverted sociophiles, deeply engaged in the morally charged generation, transformation, and circulation of various forms of value (whether eating or sharing, bleeding or infusing, harming or helping).” (Hasty 2005: 284). Through this kind of gradient moral scale, my own suggestion follows; that it becomes possible to gauge parts of an outer boundary for each individual person’s socially acceptable space for value creation. Expansions of interpersonal networks and accumulation of material wealth for oneself constitute in principle socially encouraged ambitions and markers of success – up until the point where one’s activities of taking leave other people wanting. Following Bayart’s ‘politics of the belly’, eating until one’s own belly is full indicates success, whereas overeating to the detriment of others is bad¹⁰³. A very similar principle for the freedom of individual agency exists in European and American legal and moral traditions, exemplified by the saying that “Your right to swing your arms ends just where the other man’s nose begins.” (Shapiro 2006: 141). In terms of *spatialized value*, as discussed in Chapter 2, I see this as the actualization of boundaries of otherness that limit the potential spatial dimensions any given entity can expand itself and its agency into.

In Ghana other factors and traditions serve to complicate the whole matter further. Like the different West African traditions for the spatial distribution and definition of land rights, as discussed in Chapter 3, I find that boundaries involved in transactions of goods and services likewise appear with more flexibility and persistent ambiguity than in typical contemporary Western world legal and economic approaches. For example, a young man in Bonsu Nkwanta mentioned to me how he wished to one day study to become a governmental cocoa QCO (Quality Control Officer), since this profession offered good money. When I asked him if this was because the government provided high salary levels for this type of job, the young man replied that the salary was good, but it was the extra “dashes” one could take that made it all very lucrative. A ‘dash’ is a commonly used expression across Ghana and other English speaking parts of West Africa describing a surplus quantitative or qualitative value added on top of an already agreed transaction total as a way to seal the deal (see for instance Guyer (2004: 59) regarding the use of this term in Nigeria). Another expression for the same in Ghana,

¹⁰³ Again, this logic operates as a zero-sum scenario, both if one approaches the total resources of society as sharable food on a table as well as a blood flow through a body; if one person obtains more than they need, consequently that means that others have obtained less than they should.

at least, is the addition of a “top off” to sweeten a freshly settled deal. The difference between transactions involving a socially acceptable ‘dash’ or a ‘top off’ on the one side and a socially unacceptable ‘bribe’ or a ‘kickback’ on the other side appears also largely one of degree rather than categorical definition. As I learned through my conversation with the young man in Bonsu Nkwanta, for the Ghanaian cocoa business it has apparently become accepted custom for LBC depot keepers to pay QCOs a cash amount of 1 GH¢ for each bag the latter approve and seal up for exports. Specific information like this, however, proved generally difficult to access for outsiders like myself, since many such practices of the Ghanaian cocoa business are deliberately shrouded in layers of secrecy. I still found it imperative to learn more ethnographic details about precisely such off-bounds forms of activities, since these discrepancies between formally defined procedures and actual performances, I believe, furthermore open up spaces for something very similar to that which Guyer calls ‘marginal gains’ in her work on monetary transactions in Atlantic Africa (See also Chapter 1, p.41). Thus, by effectively creating or exploiting potential margins within the Ghanaian cocoa business, shrewd negotiators can generate sizeable monetary gains for themselves, consequently providing the cocoa business of the country with a reputation as both profitable and corrupt. This, in turn, serves to make its successful participants seen as both enviable entrepreneurs and greedy cheaters that are partially to blame for the continued experiences of poverty among others.



Image 48: Cocoa bag with attached QCC approval seal awaits transport to the coast inside an LBC cocoa depot in rural Sefwi. September 2015.

Exploring the Deliberately Hidden

Despite the readiness of practically any Ghanaian I interviewed to openly acknowledge that corruption remains rampant and that practices of cheating take place throughout all parts of the Ghanaian cocoa business, it proved much more difficult to gain insights into what specific kinds of practices these people alluded to¹⁰⁴. Consider for example the following short cautionary statement that I was told during one of the very first interviews I carried out in Ghana as part of this thesis fieldwork: “There are many tricks that LBCs use to secure profits on cocoa, which they will never tell outsiders about”. The interviewee in this case was a former district manager of a Licensed Buying Company somewhere in the Western Region of Ghana, who a few years before had abruptly left the cocoa business behind and fled under false identity to the Tamale metropolitan area of Ghana’s Northern Region. I met “Mr. Shani” (an alias he asked me to use) through some of my prior contacts from my NGO affiliated days in this area. Mr. Shani’s reason for going undercover, he admitted, had been in order for him to avoid facing legal responsibility for certain financial irregularities which had rendered his department of an LBC bankrupt – the precise details of which he, however, did not feel comfortable disclosing. While Mr. Shani stated that he personally had no intention of ever returning to the Ghanaian cocoa business again, he also maintained that he still remained loyal towards some of his former colleagues still working in the business, and this loyalty prevented him from speaking openly about certain aspects of their work. His words quoted above were part of an overall cautioning to me that I should not expect to gain ethnographic insights into certain practices of the Ghanaian cocoa business.

Right from the onset of the fieldwork I had been met with such warnings by Mr. Shani and soon also by others which indicated that the Ghanaian cocoa business is seemingly characterized by both a formal, publicly visible side, as well as an informal side, commonly recognized yet also carefully concealed from public scrutiny. This apparent duality constituted quite a conundrum to me during my early fieldwork, first of all because of the immediate methodological implications for my research. I had no intentions of making my larger work goal a question of public exposition, that is, to seek to reveal the perpetrators of potentially illegal business practices, such as those apparently “many

¹⁰⁴ The tendency towards public disapproval and official illegality of many such practices meant that I only met few people who were willing to openly count themselves among those persons who truly ‘cheated’. On the other hand, I do not recall meeting one single person during my fieldworks in Ghana, who told me that they personally believed that the majority of other people working in the country’s cocoa business were doing so honestly.

tricks that LBCs use to secure profits on cocoa”. My ambition was not to try and act like another journalistic ‘Anas’ character in relation to the Ghanaian cocoa business, a man who had brought numerous others into legal trouble¹⁰⁵, but rather I sought to come closer to an understanding of how cocoa in multiple regards becomes associated with value through the many diverse ways in which people talk about and engage themselves with it. This academic ambition still kept me curious about the topic of corruption and cheating, delicate though it is, and over time and through many interactions with people familiar with the business I found an outline of understanding gradually emerge. Most often people I spoke with were only willing to allude to the topic of cheating through broad statements or intentionally vague replies. For instance, a cocoa purchasing clerk I interviewed in Juaboso stated cryptically about the management level positions of his profession that “District officers can prosper within a year, if they know their business well.” My follow-up question of whether one could prosper so quickly only through legal means was met with a wink and a broad smile and the reply that “Ehee - they have their ways. A man needs to be clever or he won’t last long in this business.” My further probes for examples of such prosperous ways of doing business gained me little beyond more evasive answers along the lines of “I couldn’t tell - this I couldn’t tell you...”

The people that proved most reluctant to meet and share information with me tended to be the ones directly involved at management levels of LBCs along with representatives from higher levels of Ghana’s national cocoa authorities. Mr. Shani’s initial warning to me turned out to have clear merit to it, although some depot keepers and LBC managers did not seem to mind my visits and were furthermore willing to talk quite openly about more innocuous aspects of their work. At other times the secrecy shrouding these parts of the Ghanaian cocoa business resulted in rather awkward fieldwork encounters. One interview I had to cut short, since the cocoa depot keeper started to visibly sweat and stutter more and more for each question I asked, until the point where I felt as if I was interrogating rather than conversing with the man. Luckily he recovered well enough to shake my hand and fluently wish me good luck with my further research, once we had left his office again and I said goodbye to him outside his depot building. At another rural depot the depot keeper first welcomed me into his office, yet soon after our interview began he excused himself to go talk for a moment with some colleagues outside. When he returned to his office again, he apologized and said that we unfortunately could not continue with our talk, since it had come to his attention that I had not presented his office with an official introduction letter from my country’s ambassador to Ghana, and it would of course be

¹⁰⁵ As first discussed in the Chapter 1, p.37-38.

impossible for him to make exceptions from proper procedures¹⁰⁶. On a third occasion I had impulsively stopped by a roadside depot where I saw the keeper sitting at a work desk outside. From there he was overseeing some workers who were bringing out bags of cocoa from the inside of the warehouse to spread and re-dry their contents on tarpaulin covers in the sunny courtyard. The depot keeper at first invited me to take a seat with him, but after I had introduced myself as an academic researcher curious about cocoa, he subsequently outright refused to answer any further of my questions, no matter how harmless I thought they were¹⁰⁷. After this third time in only a week it had happened that an attempted interview with a cocoa depot keeper had somehow gone awry, I asked Eric, my local field assistant at the time, what he thought I was doing wrong. His reply was that: “Ghanaians here [in the Sefwi traditional area] are very superstitious about white men and their abilities. They think that just by visiting, white people will have some secret tools that will detect what is really going on, and so they fear visits and are very suspicious of visitors.” My first thought upon hearing this explanation was one of surprised incredulity – I had not at all imagined that people of this region might think that *I* used secret work tools, when all across Ghana I had repeatedly been told that it was people working inside the cocoa business that used secret tricks and tools to accomplish their goals. Instantly these three awkward meetings between myself and the cocoa depot keepers now seemed to me almost like encounters between two strangers, where each one suspected the other of being a sleight-of-hand magician, and each one therefore warily conversed with the other while looking out for hints of trickery or deceit.

¹⁰⁶ To note, although I had worked as a student intern for two different Danish ambassadors to Ghana from 2008-09, I had somehow never before heard of any such expectations of proper procedures prior to this meeting in question. Consequently, I had to leave the interview with this LBC depot keeper unfinished.

¹⁰⁷ For instance, the depot keeper would neither confirm nor deny whether his company had ever used public advertising on radio or in newspapers to market themselves to potential new farmer customers. When I asked whether his LBC had any promotional materials available that I could read to learn more information about them, he replied that he was not at liberty to tell me whether they had such items. When asked, he could confirm, though, that the name of his company was in fact the very one we both could see painted in big letters on top of the depot building we sat in front of, and furthermore that the company's head office was situated in Kumasi. However, he refused to provide me with any sort of contact information to the company's headquarters. As I bid him farewell and good day after about two very awkward minutes of me attempting to initiate conversation, the keeper finally volunteered, somewhat apologetically, as I interpreted the tone of his voice, that he was really not allowed to share any information by his top management, ever since there had been this particular “incident”, which he was not able to talk about either. Puzzled, I left the place and never really did find out what sort of “incident” it was that had apparently prompted such tight-lipped secrecy.

Only in hindsight have I realized how accurately these odd encounters match with Tsing's insightful description that "Cultures are continually co-produced in the interactions I call "friction": the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference." (Tsing 2005: 4). Although I had initially considered these interviews as near complete failures on my part, they could indeed also be approached as culturally co-productive moments of friction, even if the co-production took forms unintended by each individual participant. Again, I will propose that another way to approach the emergent 'friction' of such unequal encounters could be along the lines of value theory and the idea of boundaries and 'spatialized value'. My failed attempts to engage with, establish rapport, and interview the mentioned Ghanaian cocoa depot keepers could be treated as the enactments of boundaries of difference that each reproduced a number of 'spatialized values'. One such actualization took the form of a notional boundary between 'black' and 'white' people. As previously discussed (in Chapter 3) this categorical divide had repeatedly come to the forefront of my interactions with people in rural Ghana. In the present context it immediately took a form where my mere physical appearance, coupled with my opening presentation of myself as a foreign academic researcher curious about cocoa, branded me as an outsider – doubly so. Still, the attempted interviews in question would likely have proven difficult to conduct for an indigenous academic researcher as well. As my earlier conversation with Mr. Shani had indicated, the actualized boundaries of difference between trust and distrust were not only observable and reproduced as a matter between black Ghanaians versus white Oborunis, but these types of barriers differentiating loyalty and lack of the same were also very much enacted between different Ghanaians in relation to this country's cocoa business. While Mr. Shani had stated that his continued loyalty towards some of his former cocoa business colleagues still kept him from revealing to me their exact methods of cheating, his own sense of loyalty had evidently not extended to his now former Ghanaian employer, whose district department of a Licensed Buying Company he had left in financial disarray and abandoned overnight. Another point of comparison in this regard could again be made to the 2010 exposures by investigative journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas, still infamously remembered among many people in the country's cocoa business as of 2014-15. To further contextualize his work (first discussed in Chapter 1), Anas had secured his own access to record candid videos of acts of bribery and collusion by posing as an aspiring junior insider of the cocoa business seeking assistance to carry out an intended smuggling operation across the border from Ghana to Côte d'Ivoire. Instead, Anas published videos of border officials and cocoa business people asking for and taking monetary bribes in return for their help (Food Security Ghana, April 8th 2010; The Daily Graphic, September 26th 2014)¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁸ Anas' documentary video that first exposed the illegal activities is titled "Interest of the State prt. 1" and was

Added together, these pieces of information indicate to me that while the commercial cocoa business of Ghana is commonly acknowledged as potentially very profitable, the enacted boundaries and applied methods for the realisation of such potential value do frequently not align with the formally linked institutional entities expressed in the forms of officially registered business partners or collaborators in a commodity chain. Sometimes barriers arise within single organizational units, while at other times unofficial collaborations effectively realign barriers across sections of multiple such units. Again, in keeping with Guyer's (2004) concept of 'marginal gains', I think a widespread cultural praxis can be observed that does not align well within the '-chain' imagery of an isolated unilinear flow of commercial goods that accumulate value as they are moved stepwise from production to consumption. Instead, with the multiple different profit generating interactions with other people within as well as beyond what might be characterized as any single isolated chain link, perhaps the 'chain' imagery as such is insufficient for capturing the multiplicity of cross-institutional and interpersonal loyalties, transactions, and betrayals that in turn frame the enactments of differently configured networks of meaning and value making activities. If insisting on a visual metaphor to accompany analyses of such, perhaps the image of a multidimensional mesh-work might be more fitting than one of a chain, to here borrow a term developed by Ingold (2011: 63-64). Likewise, if activities ideally intended to facilitate a lossless flow of commercial goods through a commodity chain in practice act more like a mesh-work that uncontrollably¹⁰⁹ disperses value along the way, the similarity becomes quite striking too with the imagery of the 'haemorrhaging national body' invoked by the Ghanaian journalists of Hasty's (2005) study.

Another surprising perspective on this issue of entities and loyalties emerged when I later on met with a deputy administrator of COCOBOD at the government agency's headquarters in the aptly named *Cocoa House* office building in central Accra. When I had first contacted this official by phone he had voiced scepticism towards my reasons for wishing to talk with him or any of his colleagues. However, he agreed to an interview after enquiring about my professional background and after finally becoming convinced, as he said, that I was neither a secret representative of a foreign cocoa purchaser or private chocolate company, nor an agent of *Conceil Café Cacao*, the competing government

initially presented to the Ghanaian public through various media outlets in early April 2010. This and subsequent videos were since uploaded by Anas to YouTube, where they have remained available for general viewing since October 6th 2012. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-auHOUrg1LI> [page most recently accessed August 4th 2018].

¹⁰⁹ Or rather, beyond any *one* actor's control.

agency of Côte d'Ivoire. With the boundaries of my formal affiliations thus sorted out, I was granted the opportunity to make a short interview with him the following day. During this interview I went on to ask the official what the COCOBOD agency thought about the widespread rumours of cheating and corruption throughout the Ghanaian cocoa business. His immediate reply was that "As long as they don't cheat us, it is not really our concern". The deputy administrator then went on to clarify that of course COCOBOD is aware of this cheating, however, such practices are no direct concern to them, as long as people in the domestic cocoa business only cheat each other, and so that the COCOBOD subsidiary, the CMC (Cocoa Marketing Company), always receives the full amounts and matching qualities stipulated in the contracts they issue to their LBC suppliers. Furthermore, as he continued, COCOBOD requires bank guarantees and security in collateral property of any prospective LBC applying for licence to work in Ghana. This way COCOBOD has the power to legally seize any LBC's assets in addition to revoking their business licence, if an LBC cheats and fails to deliver the contracted volumes and qualities of cocoa, for which they have been paid. In conclusion, the administrator told me, "COCOBOD has proven itself to be a pillar of stability", and, as he went on, both he and his colleagues were proud to be working there, and COCOBOD to them was "one big family". These warm sentiments were eagerly backed up by two of the deputy administrator's colleagues who happened to enter his office at this moment when my time slot for the interview was about to run out. As one of these co-workers specifically requested, I should furthermore remember to add to my interview notes that "COCOBOD is the shoulder on which all rests". I have later pondered how much this last remark, quite like the two quoted before it, aligns with the kinds of African socio-political tendencies towards presenting social entities through bodily metaphors, as argued by Bayart (1993[1989]) and Hasty (2005). Of even greater significance there is something remarkable about these COCOBOD employees' emphasis on likening their own workplace to that of a single stable family unit presented in apparent contrast to an also well-known but less stable and cheating society unit outside. Does this indicate that to the views of these governmental agency insiders, COCOBOD appears as a particular space for value creation, separate from the rest of society? In terms of formal organizational units COCOBOD encompasses multiple yet not all links of the Ghanaian cocoa commodity chain, but apparently do the reported acts of cheating and corruption throughout links outside of this agency's own not really concern its representatives, as long as they themselves remain financially unaffected. Does such a reproduction of a conceptual boundary that limits responsibility furthermore signify an institutional focus on the generation of value from cocoa production neither through each and every singular national commodity chain link transaction, nor from the export transactions serving the whole

country of Ghana, but rather primarily for the benefit of an imagined institutional “family” unit of COCOBOD itself?

My visit at the COCOBOD headquarters had also left me deeply puzzled about other aspects of the inner workings of the Ghanaian cocoa business. Especially the “many tricks” of the LBCs did afterwards seem more mysterious to me than ever. How can there reputedly be rampant cheating and corruption taking place all over the domestic commodity chain, if the numbers still somehow add up again once the cocoa is signed off and ready to leave the ports? How can officials working at COCOBOD, an institution they describe as the country’s “pillar of stability” and the “shoulder on which all rests”, remain seemingly unfazed by activities that Ghanaian media around the same time criticizes as causing “haemorrhaging” of the entire nation’s body? How can there be blood loss yet apparently no blood lost?

I will return to discuss this seeming paradox in the closing sections of this chapter. However, to properly set the stage for that discussion, I find it imperative to first engage in a more ethnographically detailed exploration of the commercial activities inside the Ghanaian domestic cocoa business, and especially the interplays between the values of hidden hard numbers and the overall value of deliberately maintained numerical uncertainty.

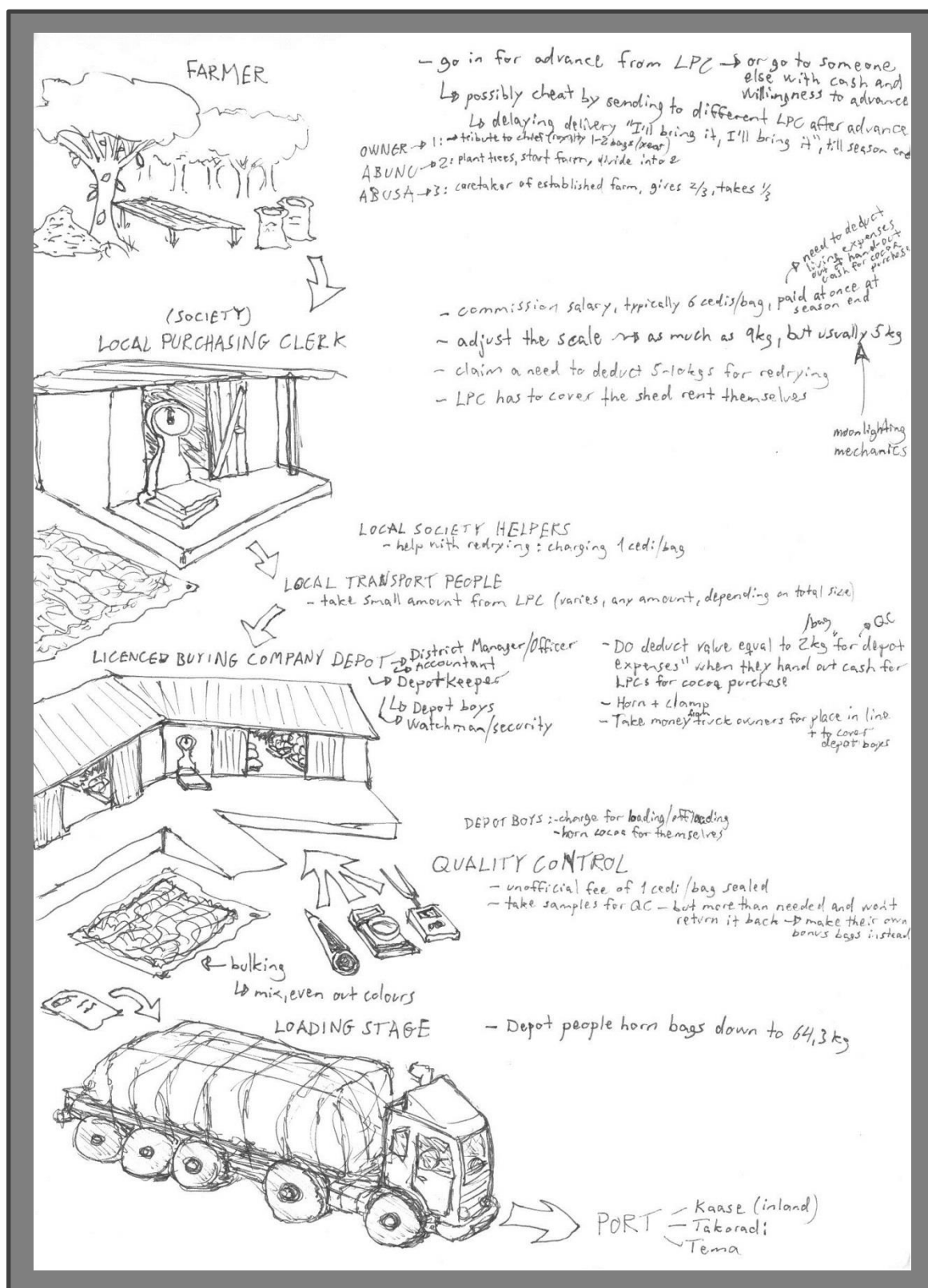


Image 49: Ways for people to make extra money from cocoa. Sketches and fieldnotes by author. Information added gradually over the course of October 2014 during conversations with a number of cocoa farmers, depot boys, and one former purchasing clerk living in the area around Juaboso and Bonsu Nkwanta in Western Region, Ghana.

As the sketch on the preceding page shows, with the help of informants, it became possible for me to gradually assemble an overview over some forms of extraordinary money generating activities carried out among people in the domestic rural cocoa business of Ghana. However, I should add the caveat that while these movements of cocoa between types of stakeholders depicted here largely correspond with the formally organized categories of the rural parts of the Ghanaian cocoa commodity chain (see Chapter 2), this particular ordering was from the onset done so by me, the researcher, rather than by any of my informants. I had first sketched out these different units after spending a number of months in the field, for the purpose of using it as a visual aid for me and my local assistant during interviews with cocoa farmers, purchasing clerks, and depot boys who frequently did not speak English and who often were also illiterate. By pointing to each part of the drawing and asking “How can someone make extra money here?”, it became possible for me to gradually fill out the right-hand side of the paper with answers. Still, some people shared job tasks between multiple places or generated extra incomes through unrelated or tangentially related activities not depicted here. Therefore, I will not go so far as to suggest that the information presented should be considered as even close to exhaustive, even if it still manages to capture what I believe are some very significant examples of extra-legal money making trickery from the rural Ghanaian cocoa business.

Cheating among Farmers and Purchasing Clerks

As discussed in Chapter 3, legal ownership of Ghanaian cocoa farm plots is often prone to dispute, especially due to the country’s dual constitutional recognition of traditional authorities’ rights to decide tribal matters on the one side and the national legal system based on British common law on the other. Especially immigrant cocoa farmers might easily find themselves on the losing sides of such cases, as national authorities, local rivalling chiefs, or other indigenous farmers might each and all claim to hold the true rights over land plots that a migrant farmer has already in good faith purchased or leased from others who have likewise claimed the ownership. Gradual land encroachments by other farmers or incursions by animals, plant diseases, or even malevolent nature spirits are other recognised perpetual threats to cocoa farms. Still, development and maintenance of a farm plot remains one of the strongest land claims that farmers can present in favour of their side. Therefore, as previously argued, the maintenance of a Ghanaian cocoa farm plot as a particular space for value creation involves ongoing attention to multiple factors of spatial reckoning, combined with vigilant acts of reaffirming its boundaries.

In regard to the issue of cheating and corruption in the Ghanaian cocoa business, my initial hypothesis has been that the cocoa farmers are most likely the ones who are being cheated the most. How else can stakeholders across subsequent commodity chain links generate their mysterious extra profits when all purchasing prices of cocoa are dictated by the government¹¹⁰ and publicized across the nation through radio, newspapers, television, and word-of-mouth? If everyone knows exactly how much any given volume of cocoa beans are supposed to be worth domestically, and if the national COCOBOD authorities claim themselves satisfied with the qualities and volumes they continuously receive - while also acknowledging that cheating and corruption takes place all through the business – then, surely, the farmers have to somehow be the ones losing out?

It did however not take many interviews with farmers across the rural Sefwi area before a different and more nuanced pattern became apparent in the dynamics between farmers and Licenced Buying Company (LBC) purchasing clerks. Rather than being a matter of one actor exploiting the other there are often long-running business relations between individual farmers and specific Licenced Purchasing Clerks (LPCs), commonly spanning decades. Farmers can frequently rely on LPCs to provide them with advance cash payments for upcoming cocoa harvests, and these farmers are willing to provide extra volumes of cocoa in return as a form of approximated interest rate when the harvest is subsequently delivered¹¹¹. Also, when I asked smallholder cocoa farmers if they ever suspected that they were being cheated by their LPCs, most replied with little more than a shrug that their chosen LPCs possibly or even likely cheated them a little, but not to a degree where it was really a problem.

From the purchasing clerks' point of view, the interviews revealed that acts of cheating are also something that can frequently be done by farmers, if a clerk is not careful. Some dishonest farmers will reportedly try and take advantage of the partial liberalization of the Ghanaian domestic cocoa market over the recent two decades, which now means that multiple LBCs¹¹² compete for the purchase of the cocoa produced from farmers of the same communities. Opportunistic farmers can therefore try to seek cash advances from clerks of different competing LBCs for the same future cocoa harvest and then continuously stall their promised delivery to several of these LPCs as long as possible

¹¹⁰ Specifically, the *Producer Price Review Committee* under COCOBOD including representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Bank of Ghana, along with a few other high-level cocoa business stakeholders.

¹¹¹ This is far from only a contemporary tendency, as historian Gareth Austin has noted evidence of this practice as far back as the 1930s (Austin 1987: 270-71). See also Amanor (1999: 55).

¹¹² According to a PBC district manager I spoke with, 37 Licenced Buying Companies were already approved for business in Ghana in the 2014-15 season. This number he expected to increase further over the next few years.

and even beyond the season's end (by repeatedly saying "I'll bring it, I'll bring it", as one of my LPC informants voiced an example of a verbally heard excuse), and in general by making themselves difficult for the affected LPCs to meet again after taking the money advance.

Both farmers and LPCs alike agreed that theft of cocoa at all stages of preparation, from ripe pods, over fermenting or drying beans, to break-ins at LPCs' small pad-locked buying sheds, are other types of incidents that members of the rural populations have to ward themselves against. Since cocoa grown on one farm plot is practically impossible to tell apart from that of another, stolen volumes of such goods are rarely possible to reunite with their rightful owners, unless a thief has been actually caught in the act. Some farmers therefore sleep overnight on their farms to deter potential cocoa thieves during harvesting periods, and some town dwelling households even opt to move their freshly harvested cocoa to town to ferment and dry it outside their compounds there, since they consider this place more safely guarded than if they were to leave it largely unmonitored on their farms in the bush. Furthermore, once in town it is also more convenient to prepare the dried cocoa for sale.



Image 50: Members of a Bonsu Nkwanta household are stirring through fermented cocoa to ensure it all dries evenly. The cocoa has been brought in from their farm plot in the bush. September 2015.

Likely, the first moment of numerical value appraisal of a given batch of cocoa will take place at the point when a farmer has estimated that their harvested and fermented cocoa has reached a point where it is now sufficiently dry to become sold. The farmer will then pour the beans from the drying mat into a ‘Ghana Cocoa Board – Produce of Ghana’-stamped jute sack that he has obtained from the locally operating LPC with whom he has decided to do business. Only very few among the cocoa farmers I visited throughout the Sefwi area were in possession of their own scales to measure the weights of their harvest with, so most of the time these sacks would simply be filled to capacity with the entire harvest batch and then subsequently weighed on the scale at the buying shed of the LPC.



Image 51: An LPC weighs a bag of cocoa on the scale outside his buying shed. The weight indication of 84kg would entitle the farmer to receive an official payment of about 278 GH¢, but due to prior arrangements between the farmer and this purchasing clerk, including a cash advance some time ago, a lower actual pay-out is now about to be negotiated between them. Akaatiso, April 2014.

Despite the officially fixed purchasing prices¹¹³ there remain still quite a few issues to be negotiated between a farmer and a clerk, before a final cash price can be determined. First of all the question of whether the contents of the weighed bag are sufficiently dried is of significant importance, most of all to the clerk. The purchasing clerks working for LBCs in Ghana are almost all paid on a commission basis, which means that they need to bring back certain numbers of full cocoa bags, for which the depot has beforehand provided them with money to buy. If the produce they buy later turn

¹¹³ Again, in the 2013-14 season this was 212 GH¢ per full 64 kg bag.

out to be too wet, say for example if a bag of cocoa contains 10% water instead of the official upper limit of 7.5%, then not only would the depot need to spend time and effort on re-drying these beans, but furthermore would they end up about 2.5% short on the final content side, once the excess water has been evaporated. Such losses the depot keeper will typically deduct from the clerk's commission payment, so the latter has a strong incentive to make absolutely sure that the total volumes they obtain from the farmers do not risk shrinking below the official specifications.



Image 52: An Aqua-Boy measurement tool issued to a governmental quality control officer. The metallic prongs are pushed through the fabric of each sealed cocoa bag and the moisture level percentages inside are indicated on the meter. Pieces of white chalk are then used to mark an 'X' on each bag that fails inspection. Cocoa depot near Juaboso, September 2015.

The Ghanaian governmental regulations stipulate that cocoa bags must contain no more than 7.5% water in order to receive approval for sale and export. However, to technically measure such moisture levels of a batch of cocoa beans requires specialized equipment. The governmental QCC officers have been supplied with so-called *Aqua-Boys*, small portable instruments that measure the electrical conductivity among cocoa beans inside bags to calculate the amounts of water present. Such tools are however very expensive (online prices I checked in 2016 tended to be around 1.600 USD or more per unit) and remain unavailable both price-wise and accessibility-wise to practically all Ghanaian farmers as well as LBCs. Instead, between farmers and purchasing clerks, the question of the moisture levels in the cocoa remains first and foremost a matter of visual and tactile estimation and negotiations.

Purchasing clerks will typically claim that the cocoa beans that farmers bring to them are uniformly too moist, and as such the clerks expect the farmers to add an extra “top-off” amount of cocoa to each bag to compensate for expected future shrinkage. Some LPCs handle the risk of shrinkage by straight up demanding that a full bag at the farm gate should contain as much as 66kg, while others I talked with spoke of 65.5kg or 64,5kg “with a top-off”. Another option for LPCs, as mentioned, is to offer the cash money to the farmers as a loan ahead of their harvest, which in turn gives the clerks extra leverage towards demanding additional “top-off” volumes to each delivered bag as a kind of interest rate payment once the beans are subsequently brought to them.

One point that I heard many people of my fieldwork area agree on, is that cocoa farmers are very frequently short on cash, and expenses for their children’s schooling, agro-chemicals against sudden invasions of pests or diseases on the cocoa farm, let alone “shocks in the family” (e.g. deaths, serious illnesses, or other kinds of crisis) will often need to be covered urgently outside the harvest seasons. Especially tenant farmers and caretakers of cocoa farms suffer from no access to alternative sources for monetary loans, since their lack of permanent landed property ownership preclude them from securing loans at the rural banks. Such farmers both benefit from LPCs’ cash advances and yet remain in perpetually weak bargaining positions in relation to the calculations of fair interest rates on those loans, due to the lack of alternatives, as well as lack of legal regulation of this completely informal loans market¹¹⁴. Furthermore, since these rural workers also tend to come from the poorest social backgrounds with low to non-existing levels of schooling, they also frequently lack the skills to effectively calculate, budget, and save up newly earned cash towards future off-season expenses, just as they lack critical access to comparative knowledge of correct weighing scale indications. Finally, most farmers also lack effective ways to counter-argue an LPC’s claims that their offered cocoa supposedly contains much more than 7.5% water and that extra, large ‘top-off’ or ‘dash’ volumes of cocoa therefore ought to be added to the deal in order to compensate.

¹¹⁴ Such ‘forward buying’ arrangements of cocoa have been observed in the region since at least the 1930s, and Amanor (1999) refers to multiple surveys conducted between the 1930s and 1950s that indicate that between 25 and 75 percent of cocoa farmers pledged part of their crop against money advances. Amanor further notes that: “The loan given was valued at half the price of the estimated cocoa yield at prevailing market prices” (ibid: 55). Austin (2005: 367-368) notes that before the establishment of state level fixed prices of cocoa in Ghana, the volatility of world market prices constituted one reason why cocoa purchasers demanded such high interest rates on advance payments. Still, contemporary research by Knudsen & Fold indicates that cocoa farmers of Juaboso District report wildly ranging interest rates between 0% to 100%, depending on the relationship between each individual purchasing clerk and farmer (Knudsen & Fold 2011: 385).

Other LPCs go even further in their efforts to ensure that they will not only avoid shortages on their final cocoa volumes but also come out ahead. The weighing scales provided by the buying companies at each LPC's individual buying shed have to first be officially tested and approved by representatives of Ghana Standards Board (GSB). Commonly voiced rumours throughout the rural areas hold that some clerks pay so-called “moonlighting mechanics” to later adjust the approved scales so that these instruments instead indicate lower weights than what are actually placed on them. This way, cheating clerks can surreptitiously obtain additional amounts of cocoa without payment, with estimates I heard ranging anywhere from 2 to 9kg and typically around 5kg extra per bag. In contrast, at the larger town and district depots the weighing scales most often remain ‘free’ and untampered with, since unannounced scale test inspections by the authorities will more frequently occur there. At the local buying sheds out in the rural communities, though, no one I spoke with had yet heard of such GSB surprise inspections taking place.



Image 53: A large cocoa weighing scale bears an official, although expired, certification sticker from Ghana Standards Board. Cocoa depot in Juaboso District. March 2014.

A licenced purchasing clerk who has adjusted his or her weighing scale can therefore often deliver the promised amount of full bags back to the depot while secretly making additional private profits. If, for instance, such a clerk has entered an agreement with a particular depot to bring back 20 bags of cocoa during the season, the depot will first provide the clerk with initial cash funds to make such a number of purchases, in this particular example around (212 Cedis x 20 bags) 4.240 GH¢¹¹⁵. If this clerk has adjusted their issued weighing scale to be off by 5kg to their own advantage, they will then after each deal become able to add the extra obtained cocoa to another sack. As a result, after purchasing about 13 secretly overweight bags this way they will then in fact be in possession of 14 correctly sized bags in their storage shed. Then, after purchasing only about 5.5 bags more, they will then become capable of delivering the contracted 20 bags of 64kg each to their home LBC depot. At this point it might look as if such cheating clerks could then quietly keep the remaining 318 GH¢ (212 Cedis x 1.5 bags) of the LBC's cash advance as their own private profit. However, I was told that all purchasing clerks actually have to deliver each bag to their depot with a weight of about 65 kg or more due to two reasons. First, the depots expect all received cocoa to automatically lose more weight from gradual moisture evaporation during the temporary storage at their warehouses, and they still need these cocoa bags to retain at least the officially required net weight by the time they ship them off. Second, the depots frequently experience that the farmers have rushed to sell their cocoa to the LPCs before it is sufficiently dry, so the depots will often need to empty and re-dry the contents of the bags arriving at their warehouses in order to bring the moisture levels down to the maximal 7.5% water limit.

The ex-LPC who described these practices to me justified such acts of cheating on the weighing scales by claiming that it has become a necessary thing to do in order to both survive and succeed as a Ghanaian cocoa purchasing clerk. First, he claimed, the depot keepers and their accountants will right from the start withhold about 2.0 kg cash value (i.e. about 6.60 GH¢) out of each bag they procure in order to cover general 'depot expenses'. So from the onset the LPCs are sent out with smaller amounts of cash than what is sufficient to actually buy all the correct number of bags of the necessary weight and at the officially decreed price. Furthermore, LPCs also typically have to pay some small amounts of money to the people who help them transport the bags they obtain from the farms and village homesteads to their local buying sheds and later on again to the larger LBC depots.

¹¹⁵ According to the LBC business people I interviewed, only clerks who have already proven themselves trustworthy will be granted such (or larger) amounts of money in advance by a depot. Typically, LBC depots will first test out new prospective clerks by only providing them enough cash to buy 2-4 bags of cocoa, and this only after securing collateral security from the junior clerk's family. If a new clerk proves trustworthy and capable of delivering, they can subsequently arrange to let them handle larger procurement volumes and cash amounts.

Finally, the clerks even have to cover both the ongoing rent of their local padlocked buying shed and their own living expenses throughout the harvest seasons, since the LBC depots will only pay them their commission – typically 6.00 GHC per bag – at the end of each season. Many clerks therefore have to spend parts of the already insufficient initial cocoa purchase cash they have been provided by the depots to just personally get by during the crop seasons. Consequently, in order to still deliver the correct number of bags despite having too little money for it, purchasing clerks have to get creative and cheat somehow. The former purchasing clerk that had explained these working conditions to me had added the comment that he personally had left the business again after only a few years, because this severe and constant pressure to make ends meet had become too much for him.

As it was described to me, unless a purchasing clerk finds ways to be creative and cheat, they will almost certainly stand to lose rather than make money from taking up this type of job. Only those who are very clever find ways to beat the odds and make real profits for themselves. The former LPC who I interviewed claimed furthermore that all LBCs in Ghana are fully aware of these practices of cheating, and that their own businesses in fact depend on such activities, since they too need to obtain certain extra volumes of cocoa at little to no additional cost in order to secure their own profits in this overall corrupt business environment.

If the LPCs' working conditions are compared analytically to this thesis' proposed combined concept of spatiality and value creation, it appears to me that the LBC depots have effectively succeeded in expanding their own boundaries for value generation onto areas formally outlined for the purchasing clerks, who in turn find themselves pressured for survival into encroaching upon the boundaries of the value generating spaces of the farmers by cheating them on the weighing scales and more. While some LPCs manage to react to the buying companies' spatialized value-push by reclaiming the deficits elsewhere to a degree where they even profit, other LPCs, perhaps those feeling more morally inhibited in regards to intentionally overstepping the boundaries of others, experience such a pressure from their own effectively narrowed space for value generation in between the buying companies and the farmers that they find themselves forced to abandon this line of work entirely.

Quite peculiarly, still, the tough business conditions established between purchasing clerks and the LBCs they work for often appear to result in closer collaborations and loyalties between individual clerks and farmers. In order to make their jobs profitable each purchasing clerk depends on somehow ensuring the continued willingness of local farmers to not only sell their cocoa produce to them rather than to a clerk of another company, but furthermore each farmer somehow has to provide

the clerk with extra volumes of cocoa beyond what they are actually paid for. From the other side of this relation, farmers benefit from the improved off-season access to cash advances from the purchasing clerks, who thereby effectively serve as local loans financiers (see also Austin 2005: 361-362). Still, despite the inequalities of their negotiating positions relative to each other, I have learned that individual purchasing clerks and cocoa farmers express widespread levels of mutual trust. Both tend to live in the same rural communities, often knowing each other and each other's families for decades already. Purchasing clerks are also often cocoa farmers themselves, frequently young grownup children of local cocoa farming parents who attempt to supplement their current meagre options for tenant farming incomes with part time LPC jobs. Often an individual LPC is also already member of a local small society of neighbouring cocoa farmers, societies whose members have agreed to help each other and thereby effectively reproduce a form of mutually shared space for value generation as bound against the larger outside society. This way, when LPCs find themselves unable to make ends meet due to the harsh conditions imposed on them by the LBCs, the clerks can in many cases draw on the established solidarity between their fellow society farmers to obtain extra volumes of cocoa to compensate.

This form of mutual collaboration is however not observable from the bounded units of typical organizational cocoa business flowcharts, which label such purchasing clerks as either ground level employees of specific LBCs or otherwise as seasonal contractors hired by them. Cocoa farmers, in turn, either appear as independent external purveyors of the company's inputs of commercial goods, or may else likely not feature as formally related to the buying company at all. Likewise, cocoa commodity chain representations distinguish between LBCs and LPCs as comprising one particular stakeholder entity, directly linked to while also fully separate from the cocoa farmers who in turn are lumped all together into one separate uniform category of primary producers. Cynically speaking, the LBCs might very well have intentionally sought to bring about and exploit this very situation. By partially alienating the weakest rung of their own work force, the LBCs can abuse the widespread solidarity and mutual responsibility shared among many cocoa farming societies as a method to extract extra value from the farmers' spaces into the LBCs' own.



Image 54: A brown layer of cocoa lays strewn out for re-drying atop a large blue tarpaulin cover outside an LBC depot near Juaboso. Behind, another batch of bags is ready to be emptied for the same purpose. All of these bags have been freshly collected by depot boys who have used the white mini truck to fetch them from a number of LPCs' buying sheds situated around the nearby countryside. September 2015.

Cheating at the Rural Licenced Buying Company Depots

After a farmer and an LPC have finished their transaction, the purchased cocoa will be put away somewhere safe – either in a room inside the local household of the clerk, or inside a separate nearby buying shed or storage room locked with one or more padlocks. Once an LPC has obtained a number of bags he or she will call the depot keeper of the affiliated LBC and request the ‘primary evacuation’, which means that transport will be arranged to bring the bags from the clerk’s local storage shed to the larger nearby buying company depot. At the depots the bags are first head-carried inside one by one by depot boys¹¹⁶. In return for their menial work these depot boys earn a small commission for each bag of cocoa that is eventually shipped out from the place. Until then they take care of all the lifting and carrying involved in the handling of the bags as these are picked from the bush, brought to

¹¹⁶ ‘Depot boys’ are almost exclusively young adult males, at least partially due to the tough physical requirements of the job. Also, in Ghana the implied low hierarchical social status of a ‘boy’ is not incidental.

the depot, and often repeatedly emptied out onto tarpaulin in the front courtyard for daytime re-drying followed by re-bagging again at sunset and storage on pallets inside for the nights.

The partial liberalization of the Ghanaian domestic market for cocoa purchases has since the late 1990s attracted a number of private companies and investors. At the time of my fieldworks there were around 37 different Licenced Buying Companies operating in Ghana. The PBC (Produce Buying Company), the now privatized former state-run company, still holds a market dominance of about 40% of the total annual cocoa output of the nation, according to a COCOBOD representative I spoke with in 2014. Many cocoa farmers likewise explained to me that they still prefer to sell their cocoa to the PBC, since they believe the Ghanaian state to remain a major shareholder in this company, which to these farmers mean that it seems less likely to go bankrupt someday than some privately operating LBC owned by foreign companies. To compete with the PBC and other strongly established competitors many smaller LBCs therefore try to differentiate themselves through various business and payment structures, various partnerships, and various forms of incentives and promotions (Tetteh Anang 2011). Some LBCs offer subsidised farming tools or fertilizers to farmers who sell their produce to them, while others make external partnerships with international chocolate companies to bring developmental improvements such as boreholes or school teaching materials to local communities¹¹⁷. Some LBCs team up with NGOs to offer bonus payments through various certification schemes supporting environmental protection efforts or improved labour and income conditions of farmers¹¹⁸. Still others base themselves as co-operative organizations owned by and working for the benefit of their cocoa farming shareholders¹¹⁹. Overall, the degree to which a farmer may receive cash directly in hand in return for the sale of their harvest has been shown to often constitute the primary factor for farmers' choices of LBCs (Vigneri & Santos 2007).

While the different LBCs in Ghana compete against each other in order to each obtain the largest possible share of the total volume of cocoa produced each season, the COCOBOD subsidiary, the CMC (Cocoa Marketing Company) meanwhile acts as the sole legal purchaser of cocoa

¹¹⁷ For instance Armajaro Ltd. whose affiliated *Source Trust* NGO has implemented a number of development efforts on behalf of foreign collaborating chocolate companies including Cadbury, Lindt, Toms, and others.

¹¹⁸ e.g. Olam Ltd., collaborating with Rainforest Alliance NGO (see also chapter 3). Kuapa Kokoo Ltd. meanwhile collaborates with the Fairtrade certification brand.

¹¹⁹ e.g. Kuapa Kokoo Ltd. (see Doherty & Tranchell 2005).

from all LBCs. From their basis in Accra the CMC employs five professional traders¹²⁰, who handle all Ghanaian cocoa sales to the world market. The CMC keeps ongoing track of the volumes of cocoa obtained by the various LBCs and decide the timing for the secondary evacuations from the many LBC depots to the portside warehouses, matching these flows to the international order volumes. Most orders are exported via palletted bags inside shipping containers (through Tema and Takoradi) while a few are exported as bulk cargo (through Takoradi only¹²¹).



Image 55: Cocoa depot belonging to the Armajaro Ltd. licenced buying company. Bonsu Nkwanta, March 2014.

A rural LBC depot building in Ghana is typically built to hold anywhere from a few hundred up to a few thousand cocoa bags at a time. In the major hub towns of Juaboso District, which count the town of Juaboso itself along with Bonsu Nkwanta, the major buying companies have gradually expanded their storage capacity by building additional depots, leading to designations such as for instance PBC depot A, B, and C in order to differentiate between their local branches.

¹²⁰ This information according to a COCOBOD deputy administrator I interviewed in November 2014.

¹²¹ As of 2015 only Takoradi has a bulking facility where previously prepared and QCC approved cocoa bags are emptied again for bulking purposes. Ghanaian bulking exports are overall limited, as most sales of bulk cocoa take place from Côte d'Ivoire.

Similarly to the conditions at the rural farms, households, and LPC storage sheds, the very generic look of cocoa makes such goods attractive targets for theft from LBC depots, since cocoa can easily be transferred into other unmarked bags and resold or simply added to a competitor's depot. Consequently, all the larger LBC depots employ round-the-clock watchmen to guard these places against intruders. One depot keeper I interviewed related how his own first year in this job had been a nightmare for him. During the peak of the main crop season, his depot had filled up faster than he could obtain the governmental QCC (Quality Control Company) approvals to send the bags forward to the port. This meant that he had been forced to temporarily storage piles of cocoa bags on tarpaulin covered pallets outdoors, and by the closing of the season he realised that someone had been able to steal hundreds of those bags from under the nose of himself and his depot watchman. The LBC main office held him responsible for this loss, so he would have been instantly bankrupted, if he had not been able to sell off a piece of family land to cover the cost of the many lost bags. Since then, the depot keeper told me, he had learned his lesson and become extra vigilant about the security of his depot, but it took him a long time to recover the amounts of money that the catastrophic first year had cost him.



Image 56: Inside a cocoa depot building belonging to the Unicom Ltd. licenced buying company. The depot keeper (wearing a white polo shirt) inspects a list of the most recently arrived bags together with one of the depot boys. Juaboso, September 2015.

When a depot keeper estimates that a sufficient number of bags are ready for inspection he will contact the local branch of the QCC to book a visit by a Quality Control Officer (QCO). These government officials have been trained to perform a standardized series of tests to classify and ensure the quality of each single bag of cocoa that is bound for export.

A QCO inspection, briefly put, involves the following consecutive steps: hygiene, moisture, purity, size, and then interior cocoa bean colour. First, the quality control officer will start out with a quick visual inspection of the conditions at the depot. Floors should be swept clean from trash and all cocoa bags should be positioned on pallets and with about half a metre of free space towards any lime-washed walls¹²². No signs of insects, reptiles, or rodents should be noticeable anywhere inside and vegetation outside the depot building should preferably have been cut back some distance to deter animals from approaching or entering¹²³. If problems are spotted during these initial observations the QCO will call off the inspection and instruct the depot keeper to bring things in order and then call for another inspection visit on a different day. Next the QCO will use an Aqua-Boy to check the moisture levels inside every bag, marking off each bag with more than 7.5% water contents as 'NTD'¹²⁴ and thereby having failed inspection. Such bags will need to be emptied and their contents re-dried before another inspection can be attempted. After this the QCO will extract a volume of cocoa beans from different sections of each remaining bag through the use of a stab sampling tool, also commonly called a 'horn'. After inspecting each sample for potential impurities, such as remaining cocoa pod husk fragments or 'abinky'¹²⁵, the QCO will mix and prepare a randomized sampling of the extracted cocoa in order to determine the average number of beans per 100g. This resulting size indication will be marked on the specific batch registration of the tested bags and constitutes an important reason for the premium quality marker of Ghanaian cocoa on the world market¹²⁶. Finally, the QCO will cut 100

¹²² Cocoa is highly hygroscopic and will therefore easily absorb taste polluting contaminants from the surroundings, for instance from being placed too close to lime-washed walls or directly on cement floors.

¹²³ Particularly rodents and snakes.

¹²⁴ NTD: "Not Totally Dry" as this condition is termed.

¹²⁵ *Abinky* indicates cocoa beans that have germinated or rotted before fermentation, or in different ways become unsuitable for consumption. The farmers are supposed to remove such abinky cocoa before selling the harvested cocoa. Subsequently, though, this waste product can occasionally be sold separately at a lower price for use in lip balm and skin pomade industries.

¹²⁶ This is partially since uniform bean sizes make it easier to avoid under- or over-roasting batches of cocoa beans at the grinders and chocolate manufacturers elsewhere, which would else impact the taste negatively.

beans in half and inspect the colours of their insides. Dark brown colours indicate that an optimal fermentation process has taken place, whereas more purple hues indicate that under-fermentation has happened, and that the cocoa thus likely still contains some bitterness. The latter condition will not be a disqualifying factor per se but will help indicate what subsequent processing steps might be necessary for a purchaser and chocolate manufacturer to apply in order to adjust the taste to match the uniform quality standard which they desire of their end product.

At the rural depots each pallet of 30 cocoa bags constitutes what is termed ‘one lot’, and each QCO is not supposed to grade more than 9 lots, i.e. 270 bags during one workday. In Juaboso I have learned that in 2015 there were a total of 23 QCOs employed¹²⁷, meaning that in the main crop season the district’s maximum official grading capacity stood at 6.210 bags per day. However, as it was explained to me, QCOs are often willing to put in extra work beyond the official limit to handle the seasonal peak flows – especially since each official charges the depots an off-the-record fee of 1.00 GH¢ per bag they approve.



Image 57: A QCC officer prepares to count the average number of cocoa beans across three 100g random samples. Photo taken at an LBC depot near Juaboso, September 2015.

¹²⁷ This number was due to recent staff reductions resulting from the administrative separation of the nearby town of Bodi into an independent political district in 2013, which had led to the transfer of some QCC officials there.

LBC depot keepers and district managers (supervisors of a number of LBC depots) administrate a central early stage in the movements of Ghanaian cocoa from tree-growing natural good to packaged export commodity, and due to the mandatory quality control procedures at all rural depots, the depot keepers and QCOs need to work closely together. Both parties have a mutual interest in helping out each other, so that both LBCs and the QCC can fulfil their formal job obligations as smoothly as possible. However, the reported established practices of off-the-books monetary fees or ‘dashes’ between them seem to indicate that their mutual understandings and collaborations are exercised on an even closer level than what would be indicated through either the formal organizational charts or the commodity chain indications. Rather, and similarly to the situation between LPCs and farmer societies, it seems to my view that LBCs and QCOs benefit from realigning the effective boundaries of their separate value generating spaces towards each other as well as against the other actors in the business. Quality control officers will in this analytical perspective on one level expand their boundaries for their value generating spaces onto the value spaces of the licenced buying companies by demanding extra ‘dash’ payments on top of what they already officially earn from the Ghanaian state for doing their jobs. However, LBCs have found ways to compensate for this value loss by withholding the aforementioned 6.60 GH¢ per bag for “depot expenses” from the cash they provide their LPCs for buying cocoa from farmers. Effectively, the LBCs have responded to, what I see, as the spatialized value encroachment into their respective territory from one side by doing their own expansionary encroachments in another direction. Furthermore, the collaborations between depots and quality control officers serve both parties well, as 500g out of every 64kg bag is officially reserved for quality control testing purposes. This amount is very generously defined compared to the actual testing needs, according to my own observations, so QCOs can easily complete their tasks with only minuscule actual losses of cocoa beans, and the remainder of all test-reserved cocoa can subsequently be added to different sacks and the profits of those quietly shared among LBC depot employees and QCC officials.

In terms of spatialized value generation this condition means that quality control activities are afforded a larger dimension than what is strictly necessary for the performances of the assigned quality control workers, yet none of the these actors have any monetary incentive to suggest reductions of this space, since the margin between the official boundary of 500g per bag and the actual boundary of the extracted and destroyed cocoa samples creates a hidden profit margin sharable between LBC depots and QCOs. If the existence of this unacknowledged profit margin was to come to the critical attention of the overall Ghanaian cocoa authorities, both QCOs and LBC depots would

likely lose out, since national governmental actors would benefit from expanding their own formal boundary making claims into this marginal space, say, for instance by decreasing the volumes of quality control reserved cocoa from 500g to 250g per 64kg bag. As it stands, however, the silently kept profit margin space appears subject to a discretely negotiated division between LBC depot managers and QCOs. In 2014-15 the boundary set between them thus appears to have constituted a 1.00 to 1.50 GH¢¹²⁸ share per tested bag for the Quality Control Officer, while the depot keeps the rest of the value by effectively pouring the remaining extracted cocoa into other sacks, which in time become full 64kg bags as well, subjects to quality testing, etc.



Image 58: Two cocoa stab samplers shown side by side. The top one is a Ghanaian government-issued version that an LBC depot, according to my source, had secretly purchased in the early 2000s from a Quality Control Officer who had then subsequently reported it lost and requisitioned a replacement. The lower one is a replica manufactured in 2015 by a blacksmith in a town in rural Western Region of Ghana.

The stab sampling tool constitutes a remarkable item in this particular connection, one that deserves special attention on its own. Stab samplers – or ‘horns’ – are hollowed out pointed metal cones some 20cm long and 5 cm wide at the open base, and which open up along the midsection of one side. This means that once they are forcibly pushed through the woven fabric of a cocoa jute bag,

¹²⁸ A few times I heard that the amount was 1.00 GH¢ while on other occasions I heard that it was 1.50 GH¢. As I was unable to get either number confirmed by anyone directly involved in these transactions, this uncertainty persists in the present analysis.

cocoa beans will fall into the open side of the hollow stab sampler cone and exit the bag through the hole at the bottom of it. This procedure is commonly referred to as 'horning', and once a sample has been extracted this way, the stab sampler can easily be removed and the hole in the bag resealed by pushing the roughly woven fabric pattern back into place again. Properly done, it is practically invisible to the naked eye to see where an extraction has taken place from a bag.

I have been informed that, officially speaking, only Quality Control Officers are allowed to be in possession of such stab samplers, but the usefulness of these types of tools mean that every single depot in effect wants to have at least one of them lying around somewhere. In some cases the depots have been able to acquire such original sampler units through illicit dealings with sources working inside the Quality Control Company, while in other cases replica tools have been obtainable either in the form of custom made creations by local blacksmiths or, as some say, from dealers of illegal goods in certain parts of the Kumasi metropolis. Some depots will generally try and keep their own stab samplers out of sight when not using them, while others remain more relaxed about it all. One time at an LBC depot I had noticed a stab sampler lying visible on a table, and so I asked the nearest depot worker at the place whether it would be a problem if a QCO came by and saw it? The worker replied that it would not be a problem if one of the regular quality control officers stopped by, since they already knew about it, and they appreciated that the depots had some extras of these tools around, so that the depot boys could help the officers do their sampling jobs more quickly. It would only become a problem, he added, if the manager of the QCC district office unexpectedly came by and personally noticed the stab sampler, since that man's high position more or less obligated him to confiscate it. The depot worker who told me this added that he had once heard about this very thing happening. In that case the depot keeper had been forced to go to the QCC district manager's private home and pay him a large bribe in order to get the horn back and to furthermore convince the district manager not to report the incident to the COCOBOD authorities, since doing so might otherwise have cost the LBC depot their business licence.

The utility of the stab sampler tool to depot workers for legal purposes is that it allows a person to quickly and efficiently make adjustments to the contents of any cocoa bag by subtracting or adding beans without spending time removing and replacing the hand sewn string that is customarily used to seal close the top opening of each bag. Therefore, if, say, loss of humidity has led to the weight of a bag becoming lower than required, extra cocoa can with minimal effort be mixed in via stab sampler to fix the deficit. The illegal utility, from the perspective of the authorities, is that the same tool allows this very same type of activity to take place on bags that have already been officially quality

tested, approved, and sealed off with a metal tab on the sewn string. However, the quality of the cocoa contents later on added or replaced might not match what was initially inside the bag at the time of the testing. In other words the stab samplers enable a kind of tampering that effectively renders the Ghanaian government authorities' certification of the contents worthless. Since the world market premium prices on Ghanaian cocoa depend on its ongoing reputation for higher quality due to these extensive quality control tests, general access to stab samplers is very problematic to the authorities.

A Margin of 300 Grams

One day I stopped by to say hello at a cocoa depot in Juaboso where I had happened to notice a bunch of depot boys who were preparing to load a large truck with bags of cocoa. These workers needed to transfer each bag manually from the warehouse to the truck. This loading procedure entails that two guys inside the depot lift one app. 64kg bag onto the head of another guy, who then carries the bag outdoors, walking via a wooden plank onto the trailer of the truck. There another guy helps the carrier drop the bag and then stack it among the others, placing them in an interlocking pattern to prevent them from shifting around, which could otherwise be hazardous for the balance of the truck. I have learned that during the hours-long loading of such a truck the local depot keeper or his deputy as well as the truck driver or his mate often stay around to keep count of the number of bags being carried onto the trailer of the truck. Afterwards they will both sign off on the accompanying waybill, which the driver will bring along in six differently coloured paper copies meant for various government institutions at the truck's destination.

However, as I entered the warehouse this day the depot keeper turned out to be momentarily absent, and instead I encountered only a group of depot boys at work. These five young men were busily using a stab sampler and an electronic scale to add 300 additional grams of cocoa beans to each of several hundred bags that were already sewn shut and which all carried the sealed metal tag approval signs of the QCC quality control. The depot boys readily explained to me that their employer had made them add this extra amount of cocoa to each of 600 bags as a pre-arranged bribe for officials at the Ghanaian port. The reason for this, as one of the depot boys explained to me, was simply that *"In Ghana, everywhere you go; corrupt, corrupt, corrupt!"* As the conversation continued I learned that while these depot workers expressed some level of annoyance with the illicit activities they had been ordered to carry out, their frustrations had less to do with corruption in general than it had to do

with the fact that they considered themselves to be badly underpaid for the work they did. According to them, the going rate they received from the LBC was only 70 Pesewas (0.70 GH¢) per full bag of cocoa they brought all the way from the scattered buying sheds out in the bush via the depot for storage, emptying, re-drying, and re-bagging, and finally onto the port-bound trucks. Meanwhile they were convinced that the money represented by the 300g of extra cocoa they now added to each bag would amount to much more money in total for whoever corrupted recipients would later extract it at the port. While an individual portion of 300g of cocoa beans could seem to represent a rather negligible potential sum of money, the insistence of these depot boys that this procedure was in fact part of a national business-wide scheme, consequently gave me cause to stop and try to establish an overview over the various numbers and discrepancies regarding the weight of the Ghanaian cocoa bags prior to export.

The official standard net weight of an export-ready Ghanaian bag of cocoa is 62.5kg. This number has been chosen in order to ease later calculations of orders and deliveries on the world market, since it means that a standard 16 bag pallet will hold a total net weight of exactly 1.000kg of cocoa. Before the moment of export, this 62.5kg net weight target needs to be present after the final portside quality control inspections have removed the amounts necessary for them to perform their sampling tests. Since the QCC officially reserves 500g out of every bag for testing, this means that a given bag ought to contain 63.0 kg net weight when quality control officers arrive at the portside warehouse to carry out their inspections.

Meanwhile, at rural Ghanaian LBC depots the official standard gross weight of each cocoa bag is defined as 64.0kg, since the empty jute sacks supplied by COCOBOD are declared to each weigh 1.0kg. This means that a truck packed with 600 bags will officially carry a total load of 38.4 tonnes on board. However, since the rural depot workers are apparently making sure that each bag secretly contains some 300g of extra cocoa, the weight indications of the waybills of the cargo trucks no longer remain true. Rather, with each single bag placed on a port-bound truck weighing a gross weight of 64.3kg, this in total adds some 180kgs of unacknowledged weight to the actually carried cargo load of any full 600 bag capacity truck.

According to the rural depot boys I talked with, there is no way for them to avoid adding these extra contents, since if they do not do so, the corrupted portside people will still extract 300g from each bag for their own profit, and then they will complain that too little contents were in the bags when they had left the rural depot, in effect forcing the LBC to compensate them for the deficit. By

adding the extras right away, at least the rural depot workers can save themselves the trouble of becoming forced to provide the same volumes later.



Image 59: A depot boy carries a bag of cocoa onto a waiting truck outside an LBC depot in rural Western Region, Ghana. March 2014.

This unofficial domestic shipping weight of 64.3kg is, notably, after extractions have been made for the rural QCC inspections and include, as mentioned, also the weight of the sack containing the beans. Since I have furthermore tested such empty jute sacks to weigh about 800g each – instead of the flat official 1.0kg weight definition¹²⁹, the combined numbers do not add up. Considering the weight of the empty sack as well, each bag reaching the port should in fact contain a true net weight of either 63.3 or 63.5kg of cocoa, depending on which estimation of the empty sack weight one follows. With a portside QCC extraction of 100 to 500g of cocoa for testing, again depending on actually observed testing procedures versus officially stated numbers, what should remain in each tested bag is a net weight between 62.8 to 63.4kg of cocoa, which leaves a discrepancy of between 0.3 and 0.9kg of surplus cocoa beans out of each export grade cocoa bag. The lower 0.3kg discrepancy, it is worth to note, appears so even if presuming full correctness of the official government numbers for sack weights

¹²⁹ Again, I treat this as another marginal space for value generation available to those actors who can successfully encroach into and maintain control over it.

and maximally permitted quality control extraction volumes at the ports. The higher 0.9kg discrepancy, in turn would be contingent on my own small-scale fieldwork observations correlating more or less with average actual practices. Adding the numbers up, out of each exportable tonne of cocoa an additional 4.8 to 14.4kg would initially remain unaccounted for, having effectively disappeared from the cocoa bags between their arrival at the portside warehouses and the actual moments of export out of the country. In percentages this translates into between 0.48 and 1.44% that would have gone missing per recorded tonne. Of course, it would be unlikely to imagine that such missing cocoa volumes would simply cease to exist, once they were out of the bags. In praxis, the illicit surplus cocoa would in all likelihood be poured into other bags and resold to portside depots, thereby eventually becoming part of the total export volume after all.

Scaling these discernible parts of the cocoa volumes up to a national scale, Ghana is estimated to have produced about 740.000 tonnes of cocoa in the 2014/15 season (ICCO 2016), almost all of it for exports. I assume that this final export figure includes any previously missing cocoa volumes, and I also assume that no further cocoa disappearances would have happened again after previously siphoned-off cocoa had been reintroduced into other bags at the ports. Given these factors it seems likely that between 3.552 and 10.656 tonnes have in one year been temporarily rerouted out of the official system and back into it again – all of this, remarkably, only around the portside warehouse links of the Ghanaian cocoa commodity chain. At a fixed purchasing price during the same season standing at 7.03 GH¢ per kilo of cocoa (if sold in a full bag, as is the case here)¹³⁰, this leads to a possible annual income of between 24.970.560 and 74.911.680 GH¢ – or in the rough USD equivalent of the time¹³¹ between about 7.8 and 23.4 million USD. The lower number includes only the value generated by the off-the-books extra 300g per bag shipped to the coast, whereas the higher one includes a scenario where excess cocoa beans reserved for sampling by the QCC – but ultimately not destroyed by their cut tests - eventually become part of the total exported volume too. It would of course be an interesting question to learn more about where and to which people these substantial funds go, but the widespread practices of secrecy, especially among the higher ranks of the Ghanaian

¹³⁰ For this particular calculation I have relied on the updated domestic purchasing prices of cocoa as they stood during the 2014/15 season, rather than the older domestic prices of the 2012-14 seasons that I have referred to in the rest of this thesis. If I had made the same calculation based on the older numbers, the monetary discrepancy would have been even larger than what is the case in the presentation here, since the inflation of the Ghanaian Cedi between 2012 and 2014 had then led to a larger difference between domestic purchases and international sales in US Dollars.

¹³¹ 3.20 GH¢/1.00USD.

cocoa business representatives, have prevented me from obtaining further insights on this matter. Where such extra profits ultimately go would appear to be mostly towards downstream stakeholders relative to all the LBC depots, since the enforced unofficial demand of 300g extra cocoa per bag means that an effective boundary encroachment has likewise been pushed into the spaces for value creation formally outlined for the activities of the LBCs.

All Ghanaian cocoa exports are handled through the governmental Cocoa Marketing Company, but there is a general lack of transparency as to the total amount of revenue generated through these exports and the distribution of these funds between farmers and the state system. The Ghanaian government formally guarantees that at least 70% of the income returns to the farmers, but the exact circumstances of this remain somewhat unclear – for instance, does the calculation of this number include only cash payments for cocoa purchases, or does it include other government investments in services supposedly meant to benefit cocoa farmers, e.g. local health clinics, scholarships for children of farmers, or even other parts of the today quite diversified COCOBOD portfolio? Most cocoa farmers I interviewed expressed profound scepticism towards the truthfulness of their own government's 70% repayment guarantee. Persistent rumours across the countryside districts hold instead that Ghanaian politicians and high-placed officials in COCOBOD systematically embezzle large amounts of funds for their own benefits – perhaps by hiding parts of such activities under the official 70% farmer repayment guarantee through token personal ownership of cocoa farms (which in everyday praxis would be managed by low-paid *abusa* caretakers), thus technically counting themselves among those farmers receiving parts of the 70% repayments.

Illicit value generating activities through cocoa do however not only happen at countryside buying sheds, rural depots, portside warehouses, or amongst corrupt elites. Additionally, the estimated calculation in the sections above would only account for those cases where the number of bags on each truck precisely corresponds with what is officially stated on the transport waybills. Notably, on a ride-along with a different cocoa trucking team than the one described in Chapter 2, I took advantage of comparing the axle load figures tested along the route¹³² with prior obtained knowledge of the weight of the empty truck with trailer. The number I ended up with contained a

¹³² Trucks would need to stop at a *Road Axle Weighing Station* along their route to the coast for the calculation of road taxes due to be paid to the national transport authorities. Maximum weight allowance of trucks driving on Ghanaian roads was these years 60 tonnes total weight distributed across no more than 10 tonnes on each axle. Although concerns for rising fuel costs made it increasingly attractive for truck owners to try and fit as many cocoa bags as possible onto each truck, these upper weight limits meant that even the largest of cocoa trucks could realistically not carry more than maximally 650-660 bags total per haul.

discrepancy of about 250kg overweight on the current cargo load, even when allowing for 0.3kg of illicit extra cocoa per bag, as well as the combined weight of our crew, current fuel tank contents, and all non-cocoa personal luggage brought on board. Unfortunately, as I failed to establish full rapport with the team of that particular cocoa transport, and since cautious warehouse personnel did not permit me to remain present during the actual on- and offloading of the cargo, the cause of this unaccounted extra weight remained unknown to me. What I found evident from this, though, is that the officially mandated tarpaulin cover holds the potential to work not only as a way to preserve the pure quality of the cocoa beans during the transport, but also as a way to keep prying eyes away from the actual cargo contents underneath, whether those eyes belong to road policemen, customs officers, or nosy anthropologists.



Image 60: The approach to a police and revenue/customs checkpoint as viewed through the front window of a cocoa carrying truck. Near Bibiani, Western Region of Ghana, October 2014.

Back on the Roads

For a closer look into more of the unregistered value generating practices of the cocoa transport sector, I will now once again return to some of the ethnographic materials gathered on the truck journey I undertook together with the truckers Ali, Muhammed, and Prince. As previously discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis the decrepit state of many Ghanaian rural feeder roads and regional main roads makes such transport journeys a physically taxing and somewhat dangerous and unhealthy line of work. I found that perhaps the only times that the mass of cargo seemed to work to the benefit of the cocoa truckers were whenever they passed various permanent and temporary police stops and revenue/customs barriers, of which I in late October 2014 counted 18 along the main route between Bonsu Nkwanta and Tema via Kumasi¹³³. Since cocoa at this point was considered government property due to the Ghanaian state monopoly on exports, the police and revenue authorities were instructed not to inspect vehicles carrying such goods. This meant that unlike most other cargo carrying travellers, our truck could most times just drive slowly past these types of barriers without stopping, while one of the truck guys would yell “kokoo-kokoo” or “eyé kokoo” [“it is cocoa!”] out of the window to the uniformed officers standing there. In the majority of cases the officers would wave the truck right by, or else just stop it briefly to allow them to inspect the waybill for confirmation. But in no case did I ever witness the tarpaulin cover being loosened for an inspection of the actual goods, and instead our truck was every time allowed to continue onwards. To the truckers, this was a considerable reprieve from the usual experiences they had when transporting other types of goods through Ghana. In such cases, they said, the officers “They will trouble you so much” by demanding to see papers, receipts, and spend time inspecting the vehicles for any faults or irregularities. In short, according to the truckers, zealous officers would always find something to blame one for, with the purpose of pressuring the truckers into paying bribes in order to be permitted to continue their journey, or else they could be detained for hours or even days.

During one incident on the previously described cocoa truck journey a group of uniformed officers had motioned for our truck to pull over at a police barrier that had been placed across the road. A young officer opened the passenger side door and asked to see our registration papers and the transport waybill. As he noticed me, a white passenger inside the cab, he looked at me

¹³³ These inspection practices have since changed due to a declaration by the Ghanaian government on May 18th 2017 that all Ghanaian roadside customs barriers would have to be removed, effectively September 1st the same year. (Ghana News Agency, May 18th 2017).

with an expression of surprise for a second before specifying that one of the Ghanaian truckers should actually exit the truck with the documentation in hand and walk along with him to the back of the cargo trailer. Ali quickly obliged and left the truck, making sure to close the passenger side door after him as he went. This enabled me to discretely view the events that followed through the side view mirror as Ali and the officer went to stand and talk by the road side at the far end of the trailer, out of earshot from the rest of us. After quickly leafing through the documents the officer asked something of Ali, who replied with headshakes and a few words. The officer spoke again now with more agitated body movements, and moments later Ali suddenly sat down on his knees on the road in front of the officer, folded his hands as in prayer and raised his arms upwards to him as if begging for something. The officer looked silently at Ali for a moment before waving him to get up. As Ali stood up again the officer tossed back the paperwork to him and gestured for him to go back to the truck. With Ali back inside Muhammed started up the engine and turned us back out on the road again. Ali was visibly agitated as we left the police barrier behind and immediately asked me whether I had seen what happened. I nodded and asked what he and the police officer had talked about. Ali replied that the policeman had first told him to walk to the back of the truck, because he – like other corrupt officials – did not want any white foreigner to witness him make demands for bribes. According to Ali the police officer had argued that this truck team must surely have made quite a lot of money from carrying such a sizeable cargo of cocoa, and so they ought to share some of it with him. Ali said that he had replied to this that it was still early in the season and they had just gotten back on the road again, so they had not earned any money yet to give to the officer. The officer had then asked whether the Oburoni [white person] passenger had paid the team anything for the transport opportunity, to which Ali had replied – truthfully – that they had invited their white passenger along free of charge, and so again he did not have any money to give to the policeman. The young policeman had remained sceptical and asked for at least some symbolic amount of 5 GH¢, but in the end Ali had sat down on his knees and begged the officer to simply let us continue for free, which finally had frustrated the police officer to the point where he relented his demands. Back again here in the truck Ali added his headshaking disgust to his descriptions of the event by repeatedly referring to the young policeman with the derogatory terms of “that small boy... smaall small boy!”

After the moods in the cab had cooled down a bit again I convinced Ali to elaborate some more on the relationship between Ghanaian roadside officials and truckers working on the roads. Demands for bribes were very common, he told me, and even if you managed to keep your truck, cargo, and your paperwork in perfect order this would be no guarantee that you would be spared from such troubles. Officers could always detain you and your vehicle for extended periods of time while

claiming to be checking your licences with colleagues in offices elsewhere, while in fact they were only waiting for you or your boss to grow so sufficiently tired of the delay that you would be willing to pay a bribe in order to be let go. For this reason, Ali said, this team had actually been provided with a pool of ‘road money’ by their boss, from which they could pay bribes if need be, since making the goods arrive on time at the destination was of greater importance. They had about 100 GH¢ in this pool that should cover potential bribes, urgent spare part purchases, and various repairs along the way, with part of any surplus being paid out to the team as a bonus upon arrival at the destination. This, the guys on the truck all added, was a good reason to try and negotiate as much as possible with the demands of the officers.

Fuel money was usually handled as a separate pool of funds aboard the cocoa truck, and the fuel consumption on such a long journey constituted a considerable expense. Ali told me how this team had recently switched over to making electronic payment transfers via a cell-phone app usable at a specific filling station franchise, with which the team’s boss had established an account. This measure now reduced their risk of cash losses during possible highway robberies along the way, although at times the unstable phone and data network services across the country now caused delays at filling stations as everyone waited for payments to be digitally processed. On another cocoa truck journey with a different team I had learned how this team still relied on cash purchases of their diesel fuel, something which with this truck’s approximately 200 litre fuel tank capacity had resulted in quite large sums transacted at a time at filling stations. On this other journey, furthermore, I found out that that the driver and his mate had colluded with a particular filling station attendant to write out a receipt for a larger amount of diesel than they actually purchased. This way the two truckers pocketed 50 GH¢ of their employer’s fuel cash money while the attendant also pocketed a smaller cash amount plus set aside the extra fuel to sell for private profit later. Afterwards, when the team’s boss inquired about the seemingly low fuel efficiency of their completed journey, the driver would explain it off as extra dense traffic conditions combined with a supposedly leaking diesel filter on their engine. Effectively, I suggest the view that the two truckers and the filling station attendant had succeeded in encroaching upon the boundaries of the truck owner’s space for value generation, splitting their secretly created marginal profit space by negotiating another boundary dividing the extractable value between them (50 GH¢ on one side, diesel fuel and an unknown future amount of Cedis on the other).

Finally, as for yet other potential forms of losses during transport, truckers had stories aplenty about robbers hiding in the forests around some of the countryside roads. Such robbers would ambush cocoa trucks to steal their fuel, cash and cargo, later re-bagging and re-selling the stolen cocoa

beans to other depots. For this reason, all haulage business workers I interviewed were very concerned about avoiding any serious truck breakdowns or other causes of delays that might force a team to stop overnight along certain stretches of the rural road networks, especially southwest of Kumasi. This latter sort of danger posed perhaps the most extreme form of incursion, since it threatened to violently take over an entire space for value generation controlled by one group of actors (truck owner and crew) and extract its value potential into the hands of others (bandits and fences of stolen goods).

Truckers, policemen, filling station attendants, and roadside robbers – the Ghanaian cocoa transport sector seemed to be teeming with profit-seeking actors not formally acknowledged as present in commodity chain depictions of the same. If continuing here with a throwback to the sort of commodity chain imagery discussed in Chapter 2, the objective from the cocoa commodity chain owners' side would be to maximize their profits, which involves the protection of the volume and quality of the goods along the way. In this perspective, each of the aforementioned actors would appear as outsiders attempting to encroach upon a space for value generation, the ownership of which was claimed in the first instance by the haulage contractor and in the second instance by the Ghanaian state. As Ghanaian popular media would likely frame these types of incidents, as suggested by Hasty's (2005) study, the acts of cheating and corruption among truckers, highway officials, and other roadside opportunity seekers can either be construed as immoral actions by individual voracious cheaters, or, in contrast as vigilante citizens attempting to secure their rightful fair shares of their society's valuables, even as powerful vampiric kleptocrats work to extract it all for their own benefits. Again, the moral implications of such actions seem quite dependant on the positions each judging person occupies while observing the encroachments by others.

Portside Practices and Tricks of the Cocoa Trucking Trade

When after a day and a half on the road the cocoa truck of Ali, Muhammed, and Prince had finally arrived at the destination in the port of Tema, the team prepared themselves to wait around for a number of days at the PBC truck yard before their truck could be offloaded. According to the team, corrupt government logistics officials deliberately created bottlenecks at this offloading stage in attempts to pressure bribes out of truck owners, who were often in a rush to continue on with other contract jobs, and who could thus be induced to pay extra to get ahead in line. This time the truck's owner, Mr. Sammy, was willing to pay such extra money, an amount he later confided to me was 500

GH¢, and so to the team's slight but pleased surprise the truck was directed to proceed to a nearby cocoa storage facility for offloading after only a couple of days in Tema.



Image 61: A line of trucks loaded with cocoa bags are parked at the PBC truck yard inside Community 5 of Tema. There they await clearance to proceed to various portside warehouses to offload. In the background lies a massive concrete silo, built for the purposes of cocoa storage during the Nkrumah presidency in the early 1960s, yet apparently never put to actual use. Photo taken March 2014 with the permission of the attending PBC watchman of the truck yard.

While we had settled in for the wait in Tema, the trucking team had introduced me to their boss, Mr. Sammy. He in turn described himself as a hard working Ghanaian business entrepreneur who had sought to take advantage of the seasonal cocoa transport market. As a former expat now in his mid-forties residing near the port city of Tema, Mr. Sammy had some years ago started in the business by investing his European-made savings in the import of second hand trucks and cars from Europe and United States. He then either resold the vehicles to buyers in Ghana or put them to use in his own small haulage company. After first focusing on the inland transport of cement bags and tiles for a few years he, like many other Ghanaian truck owners, became tempted by the lucrative prospects of the country's seasonal cocoa haulage opportunities.

Mr. Sammy happily agreed to let me tag along with him over a few of his next workdays so that I might also study the dynamics of the portside cocoa truck business more closely. One of the first places we visited was an abandoned lot near the commercial container port of Tema where Mr.

Sammy often met and spent time together with a group of other independent truck owners. This group of trusted friends and colleagues – “men who all know themselves”, as Sammy had phrased it when he first introduced them to me – worked together as a kind of informal transport employers’ union. All of them were middle-aged to elderly Ghanaian males, and, as they told me, they had years ago claimed this little outdoors spot by a failed hotel building project as their base of operations. Here they kept a simple office setup consisting of a couple of wooden benches and a few plastic chairs on the ground set against one of the crude outer concrete walls of a building that never fully was. Here the group met casually during the days to distribute new transport jobs amongst each other, to discuss the hiring and performances of drivers and mechanics, to organise the procurement of spare parts, and to consult each other on how to handle miscellaneous issues that occasionally cropped up, for instance specific transport licencing or contract documentation demands made by various government agencies or haulage customers. Most of the men owned between one and four trucks each, and from their convenient location here at the portside they were constantly keeping their cell phones at hand and ready to negotiate new business contracts and to keep themselves updated on the current status of their truck teams that were moving around on the interior roads as far north as Burkina Faso, picking and delivering goods.

At this time in early November 2014 the main crop cocoa season was now in full swing, and this too was the most important part of the year for the independent haulage business. Mr. Sammy explained that he and his colleagues made most of their annual incomes from bringing cocoa down to the ports, and cocoa transport remained far more profitable than bringing container goods upcountry. As for the container goods, Sammy, like several of his colleagues, worked with portside agents who – for a commission – helped get them transport jobs from the import companies here in Tema.

When it came to the matter of cocoa contracts, each truck owner instead communicated directly with individual depot keepers around the country. Mr. Sammy explained how the careful maintenance and nurturing of such personal contacts were imperative for becoming successful in the private cocoa haulage business. He had for instance meticulously established close contacts and understandings with a number of depot keepers of the PBC company around the rural Western Region of Ghana, with whom he now made “arrangements”, as he called it. For example, at the closing of the main crop season each year the PBC central administration would call their depot keepers around the country and ask them each to count how many independent trucks were currently still waiting to load outside their depots, then report that number and all the trucks’ registration plates to the main PBC office and then admit no further trucks to the line. However, in exchange for 1.500 GH¢ Mr. Sammy had arranged with the depot keeper of one such depot to count two of Sammy’s trucks as present and

waiting, even though they were in fact not yet back there on the spot, when the PBC call came. This trick secured him another two cocoa hauls by the final closing days of the season and ultimately an extra net profit he would not have been able to access, unless he had made that particular ‘arrangement’. At the beginning of this season, Sammy went on, due to the good terms he had developed with these rural depot keepers, one of them even called him on the phone and offered him to get the first three spots in his line for cocoa loading at that keeper’s depot. These advantageous arrangements meant that Sammy’s trucks were often ahead of the competing transport companies right from the start. Furthermore, during each season depot keepers would hand out numbers in line to cocoa trucks in the order that they arrived at their particular depot. This way each truck would be loaded according to its spot in the cue. With the special ‘arrangements’, though, a depot keeper might discretely withhold a few numbers so that Mr. Sammy’s trucks could arrive to immediately receive a number in, say, the 10-15 number range, even if there were already 26-28 trucks waiting. As Mr. Sammy added, none of the already waiting drivers would dare to get too angry about such preferential treatments of others, since they might risk losing future work opportunities at this particular depot location, if they made too much fuss. As long as the line skipping was not too excessive, people tolerated this ingenuity of others – after all, those others had likely paid for their privilege.



Image 62: Trucks await their turn to be loaded outside a large cocoa depot in Bonsu Nkwanta. September 2015.

While Mr. Sammy and his fellow truck boss friends in this and other ways helped each other with tips and tricks to get ahead of competing haulage companies outside their informal group, they also shared common concerns and worries for the future of the private cocoa haulage business of Ghana. Increasingly, they said, the PBC and other licenced buying companies were only asking for private contractor transport from the very most remote rural areas and until warehouses in Kaase, near Kumasi in the central southern part of the country. From there the companies would use their own trucks to transport the cocoa the rest of the way down to the ports of Tema or Takoradi. The reason for this, the bosses explained, was that the roads from Kumasi and south were better maintained, so the PBC and other LBCs all tried to save expenses on long haulage costs while also sparing their own company vehicles from wear and tear on the very poor rural roads.

Following this part of the conversation, one of Mr. Sammy's fellow truck bosses expressed his surprise to hear that I had in fact already happened to have met one of the high-ranking PBC transport logistics officials whose department they had just mentioned¹³⁴. As this truck boss said: "You met this man? – And he didn't charge you anything?" I replied that indeed no words of gifts or payments had been mentioned at all. Hearing this, the truck owner shook his head and exclaimed: "Then that must be because you're white – and he doesn't expect you to know how things work around here. For us blacks, to ask this big man of his time, it would cost!" Evidently, there seemed to be quite a few more aspects to the transactions taking place through the Ghanaian cocoa commodity chain than that very same senior logistics official had once put onto paper for me inside his office.

As I joined Mr. Sammy for his lunch at a Tema roadside eatery, I asked him to explain his operating costs in more detail. First, he estimated that the diesel fuel to go from Bonsu Nkwanta to Tema and back cost some 2.000 GH¢ total. Adding to that came the monthly salary of 300 GH¢ for the driver, along with another typically 300 GH¢ 'sitting money' (10 per day) for him to wait in line at a depot in Bonsu Nkwanta or elsewhere. Then there came a completion bonus of 200 GH¢ to the driver for successfully bringing the cocoa down to the port, and a 50 GH¢ bonus to the mate for the same (to note, the truck mates were picked by the drivers and not paid by the truck owners – except for this one instance). Also, there was 100 GH¢ set off as 'road money' to take care of road toll fees, necessary small 'gifts' for road officials, and small repairs along the way. Then there was 100 GH¢ to be paid to the depot boys who loaded the truck and 25 GH¢ for the depot boys offloading (the latter was easier

¹³⁴ Specifically, the senior logistics official who had drawn me the picture of the country's cocoa commodity chain discussed in Chapter 2.

and thus cheaper). Furthermore there was also the issue of paying a bribe to portside logistics contacts to get the truck offloaded quickly, a service which typically cost him 500 GH¢. All in all Mr Sammy counted that by also including the previously mentioned about 1.500 GH¢ seasonal ‘arrangements’ with individual rural depot keepers, he easily had expenses of around 5.000 GH¢ per haul before covering any larger truck repairs that frequently became necessary too, not least due to his aging trucks and the bad roads.

The Ghanaian government’s compensation rates for cocoa transport contracts vary significantly according to geographical distances between the various administrative districts of the inland depots and the ports. Furthermore, once a single independent haulage contractor exceeds a certain total tonnage of cocoa carried per year, they will become eligible for obtaining a status of ‘official contractor’, which entails better rates of payment. In 2014 Mr. Sammy stated that the government paid him about 9.000 GH¢ before taxes for a haul of 600 bags of cocoa from Bonsu Nkwanta to Tema. After taxes and various governmental fees the pay-out for one such haul amounted to somewhere short of 7.000 GH¢, leaving him a profit of about 1.500 - 2.000 GH¢, unless something had broken on the truck. As I learned, new spare truck tyres in Tema cost between 850 – 1.450 GH¢ a piece in 2014, while for instance a waterproof trailer tarpaulin, like those mandated for cocoa transport, would cost anywhere from 1.400 GH¢ for a second-hand one and much more for new ones. Meanwhile a major replacement part, such as a full truck gearbox, would however easily cost something like 7.000 GH¢. Therefore, while cocoa haulage contracts could be clearly profitable for truck owners, they also involved quite substantial hidden expenses in order to carry them out successfully, just like they also involved certain risks for every ride that those profits might turn into losses in case of road accidents and expensive vehicle component failures.

As I spent more time with Mr. Sammy I came to realise that his sympathetic sharing of information for my academic research project had another side to it as well. During two days in Tema he had invited me to come along with him to his various business meetings. These included a visit to his bank to deposit the coveted CMC payment cheque the he had just received from the completed cocoa haul. We also went for a back-room meeting with the manager of a local fuel station with whom Mr. Sammy negotiated a tankful of diesel on credit for the next cargo truck he would be sending out on a job. Later we both joined up again with Ali to go visit a nearby scrapyard to rummage for spare truck parts, eventually tracking down a functional third gear replacement for the DAF truck we had travelled with. Mr. Sammy then negotiated with the scrap dealer to add this spare part to an ongoing business deal of theirs already involving some number of Chinese made truck tires, as far I understood.

At the end of the second day I thanked Mr Sammy for letting me follow along and gain insights into some of his work tasks as an independent cocoa trucking boss. Mr Sammy promptly turned these words of gratitude around, as he commented that having a foreign white man accompany him for his meetings of these days had impressed his local business partners by discretely enhancing his appearance of having international connections and resources, which in turn helped boost his local image of credit worthiness. Therefore, as it turned out, it seems that I had unintentionally served the role as a useful prop for his business ambitions. Looking back, as previously mentioned in brief in regards to parts of Graeber's work on value theory (Chapter 4, p.174), making oneself appear like a resourceful and well-connected person serves as a potent prescription for how one expects others to treat one in return. Likewise, as Tsing has pointed out (2005; 2000) the imagination of potentially profitable business ventures needs to be convincingly conjured first in order to attract investors, whose resources may – or may not – subsequently enable such imagined value to become material and extractable. In both cases, I recognize efforts of people towards the creation of perceived spatial entities, whether such involve the recognition of a 'big man' as exactly that, or a space for value creation either unclaimed by others or so weakly defended by others that the value that might potentially be gained appears worthwhile the efforts and the risks necessary in order to encroach, claim, and extract.

A Greasy Commodity Chain and That Which Slips Away

While the idealized movement of goods imagined in the 'chain' concepts, especially when applied within business contexts, tends to lump together all alternative, unapproved income generating activities along the chain as 'corrupt', 'criminal', or 'cheating', such denouncements seem largely founded on the invested commodity chain controller's claim to principled ownership of an imagined totality of value that might become extracted and transformed into profits for the owners and their collaborating partners and investors. Comparing such various illicit activities to the commodity chain imagery, corruption in the form of bribery, dashes, and top-offs, can however also designate instances where unregistered transfers of money or goods take place completely within what appears to be the formally established links and channels of the system. In other words, such acts of *corruption* can arguably serve to "grease the links" inside a commodity chain and to hasten the throughput and overall performance of the system. As according to the previously discussed statements by the COCOBOD official, it is apparently possible in Ghana to have multiple practices of cheating and corruption take

place throughout the country while still having the officially expected numbers of the domestic cocoa commodity chain add up again at the export linkage point with the international markets.

On the other hand, *cheating* in general can also refer loosely to instances of value generation that escape the boundaries formally set by the commodity chain owners. Additionally, while corruption represents activities of exchange for purposes of profit generation for a limited group of persons or companies involved, cheating seems more to represent activities of gaining or obtaining profits that take place through the actions of individuals acting for their own immediate benefit. As it was, Mr. Sammy's willingness to pay bribes to both the inland depot keepers and to key portside logistics officials served to hasten the movement of the transported cocoa into the subsequent links of the commodity chain. Effectively, he re-allocated parts of his legally approved haulage service income to others in order to create and nurture an informal personal network across different links of the commodity chain, a network of people whose collaboration resulted in more rapid completions of their work tasks. This in turn enabled them to process larger volumes of cocoa annually than other contractors, and therefore effectively they each obtained larger shares of the total amount of funding invested in the country's cocoa haulage sector each season. By creating such an informal network within the formal network, I suggest that this collaboration can be viewed analytically as the creation of an intricate space for value creation. Although the value generating activities of Mr. Sammy's group involved 'arrangements' that others would likely describe as acts of corruption, the consequences of the group's collaboration appear fully cost-neutral to the accounts of the national cocoa authorities, since the 'arrangements' were financed out of Mr. Sammy's governmental contract money and furthermore served to aid the speed of the cocoa flow through the established commodity chain. In this particular perspective these acts of 'cheating' may appear quite benign from the point of view of COCOBOD – and therefore, perhaps, "it is not really our concern", as the interviewed deputy administrator had said – as any value losses from bribery will only happen between competing haulage contractors and depot keepers rather than affecting the accounts of the national authorities as well. Likewise, the monetary 'dashes' between LBC depots and QCOs and weighing scale cheating between LPCs and farmers remain inconsequential for COCOBOD, since the profit seeking boundary encroaching activities among them create compensation seeking ripples of similar activities that move towards the weakest of the primary producers, the smallholder cocoa farmers, rather than through the chain to the national level. Therefore, even as acts of cheating and corruption cause "bleeding" beyond any and all of the officially defined entities and boundaries of the domestic commodity chain system, as long as this bleeding remains internal to this system as a whole, the national cocoa authorities can safely ignore it. Hence, resolving this chapter's formerly posed seeming paradox of bleeding without actual blood loss.

In comparison, cross-border smuggling constitutes exactly a kind of value generating activity that exceeds the outer boundaries of COCOBOD's control, and hence these types of activities provoke direct government attempts at intervention. Furthermore, the prior example of collusion between a truck team and a filling station attendant, along with the described case of the bribe demanding policeman, also show instances where monetary value are sought extracted into hands of people not formally recognized as recipients of any such by the owners of the domestic cocoa commodity chain. Such differently aligned interactions between people for the purposes of the obtainment of monetary value from the cocoa business can likewise be approached as attempted expansions of boundaries of spaces for value generation, this time however, spaces that actualize value in directions leading outside the formalized chain. Hence, such forms of value losses stand as potentially more problematic to these formally recognized participants in the Ghanaian cocoa business, as this represents encroachment acts into spaces claimed by them for their own value creation. As it appears, though, as long as the cocoa haulage contractors can still absorb these continued small profit losses and survive in the business despite them, COCOBOD can likewise afford to stand idly by with merely a blanket decree that cocoa trucks are exempt from roadside revenue and customs inspections. However, once the losses from delays and bribe demands by too many artificially established police and revenue/customs road barriers (or, boundaries for value extraction as I would designate them) exceed a certain level, then the national authorities would feel a need to step in – a political move which in fact has happened in May of 2017¹³⁵.

What I regard as most analytically relevant here is not so much the actual methods of cheating through which people strive to create extra profits through the Ghanaian cocoa business. Rather, the crux of the matter is to me rather the implications of cheating itself as a social phenomenon coupled with the characteristic secrecy surrounding the specific methods. Similar to my discussion in Chapter 4 of a condition of indeterminacy shrouding an interim period between impoverished cocoa farmers' presently experienced time of poverty and a to them desired future time of wealth, so will I suggest that the overall practice of 'cheating' constitutes a factor of indeterminacy as well. Most people in rural southwestern Ghana earn only meagre incomes from cocoa farming while the material wealth of other people elsewhere in the same business remains evident to everyone. It is commonly known in Ghana that the cocoa business can make a person wealthy, but the exact ways one might actually do so remain largely hidden from public view. Similarly to popular images of commercial bankers and

¹³⁵ Again, as announced by the Ghanaian government on May 18th 2017 all Ghanaian roadside customs barriers would have to be removed, effectively September 1st the same year. (Ghana News Agency, May 18th 2017).

religious leaders, successful entrepreneurs in the cocoa business are recognized as gatekeepers to material wealth and guardians of the exact methods by which to obtain it. Effectively, a shroud of indeterminacy hangs over central aspects of the Ghanaian cocoa business, and rather than attempting to uncover each and all of the hidden actual practices beneath, I will suggest that this condition of concealment by itself constitutes perhaps the most important aspect of what can be theorized as *spatialized value* creation in regards to Ghanaian cocoa production.

The All-Important Preservation of Indeterminacy

Indeterminacy remains a significant aspect of human life in Ghana to this day, even if this condition is more often lamented rather than celebrated. In Chapters 2 and 3 I have recounted how a number of academic works have discussed cases where historical Asante and Sefwi-Akan conceptualizations of spatiality, time, territory, and material and spiritual entities over centuries have frustrated both colonial and post-colonial administrators' ambitions to organize the region's geography and populations according to systems based on definitive categorical clarity. In colonial times the local populations' higher levels of tolerance for unresolved ambiguity and contestant claims to land and authority had repeatedly forced European colonial representatives to begrudgingly exercise flexibility in their own administrative practices, as for instance clearly summed up by Nugent & Asiwaju: "[C]olonial officials were dependent on the goodwill of local populations for their day-to-day existence. This inevitably fostered compromises which had no place in the official manual. Because colonial functionaries tended to keep up appearances, the deals that were struck tended not to enter the official record." (Nugent & Asiwaju 1996: 5). Arguments like this go against simplified interpretations of European colonialists seen as the implementers of modern forms of society through systems of rational scientific and administrative development, as opposed to local populations presented as the adherents to outdated traditions, founded in superstition and irrational ambiguity. Rather, what these materials suggest is that everyday pragmatism has remained at the forefront among appointed government officials, colonial or not, and for this reason that the dynamics and tensions between definitional clarity and persistent uncertainty appear as much a part of Ghana's colonial past as a part of its contemporary post-colonial present. As the authors quoted above go on to exemplify, in cases where border officials remain dependent on a rural border population to sell them food plus provide accommodation, then how is such an official supposed to go about arresting, say, his land lord or land lord's family for smuggling? (ibid: 7-8). Such dilemmas fuelled by discrepancies between official doctrines and practical

conditions remained very much relevant among the border officials I interacted with in the contemporary southern Ghanaian – Ivoirian border zone¹³⁶.

Although critical public attention to matters of corruption among Ghanaian border officials has increased since the scandal caused by Anas' journalistic exposures of 2010, the practical consequences remain difficult to spot. In 2014 residents of one of the many border town communities I stayed in told me how it remained an open secret that a lively array of smuggling activities still took place across the border in that very town. Rather than using the official border crossing smugglers of cocoa and other goods would instead discretely move their vehicles across at a wheel track less than 100m south of the official border crossing. This spot was still so conveniently close that certain colluding border officials could monitor and collect bribes from the traffic, while also just far enough away and concealed behind a building so that the same officials could plausibly deny knowledge thereof, in case a superior officer visited the town on a surprise inspection. Smaller levels of smuggling, such as one or two bags of cocoa at a time on the back of a motorcycle or a cocoa bag inside the trunk of a car, was something that most border officials would typically either ignore or wave past at the official crossing point in exchange for a small cash amount, perhaps 5 GH¢, as one resident of this border region told me.

When I in 2014 had asked one of the Immigration Officers stationed at the Akaatso border crossing what had changed at that place since the Anas incident, the officer replied only that since then all photography had been prohibited near these border crossings. As an apparent solution to a corruption scandal, this measure at first appeared as profoundly counter-intuitive to me, as I had expected to hear about consequences along the exact opposite lines of enhanced surveillance efforts and increased regulatory oversight after such a documentation of illegal activities. In Ghana, however, efforts to effectively preserve or even enhance the indeterminacy of the actual activities carried out at a given border crossing serves multiple purposes. On one level it keeps the commanding officers of the Immigrations and Customs Services from being forced into situations where they have to directly confront and attempt to permanently prevent such types of activities that remain largely similar to other activities continuously carried out among many other public and private gatekeepers across the society. Efforts to effectively put a full stop to smuggling would likely increase antagonism between border officials and local border region populations benefitting from smuggling. Such efforts would likely also

¹³⁶ And as the Anas revelations of 2010 have further demonstrated, collusion among officials and cocoa smugglers had even reached a point where members of a specially appointed national anti-smuggling task force were candidly video recorded while aiding smugglers in return for bribes (GhanaWeb April 15, 2010).

hurt the morale among ground level officials and their immediate superiors, as these would see a cherished source of supplementary income disappear. On another level I believe that these efforts to preserve the shroud of secrecy and indeterminacy governing the actual activities at the border crossings also reflect the contemporary tensions perpetuated by Ghana's legal constitution. As discussed previously (Chapter 3), the constitution empowers a dual legal system which recognizes both the authority of tribal traditions and a national body of laws. Consequently, this duality enables the chronic conditions of indeterminacy in regards to the exact boundaries of land rights and the extent of authority of one governmental administrative sector or tribal stool compared to another.

This ongoing ambiguity is a feature that has long been actively reproduced by traditional powerholders across Ghana, according to anthropologists Boni (2008) as well as Berry (2001). As argued by Boni, such preservation of indeterminacy effectively guarantees that people in positions of power (i.e. chiefs, elders, men, those identified as 'natives', and government officials) can maintain the faculty to decide the allocations of land rights and revenues (Boni 2008: 83). Likewise, Berry's research leads her to conclude that traditional Asante chiefs often intentionally refrain from specifying the exact demarcation of boundaries on the lands they orally consider as part of their own stool. This way the chiefs can both maintain a higher degree of flexibility towards their demands for tithes or recurrent tributes from users of such lands, as well as retain the ability to use their land claims based on oral traditions as part of ongoing or anticipated future struggles over power and jurisdiction against other neighbouring chiefs (Berry 2001). Exact boundaries, in other words, will only be clearly defined once a claimholder finds them self in a position where they feel confident that they will become satisfactorily compensated for doing so. As I have argued, a way to fruitfully analyse this condition entails approaching any given space as subjected to inherent expansionary agency by those claiming it. By intentionally maintaining the outer boundaries of one's spatial claim as vague and fuzzy, one retains the ability to continuously attempt to expand its effective dimensions whenever the opportunity to do so appears. Of course, on the other hand, a person may likewise find themselves in a relatively weak and threatened position for the future maintenance of their own current spatial claim, say, if bordered by a more powerful neighbour exerting their own expansionary force, such as through gradual land incursions. The weaker party would then do well to strive for recognizable specificity of their spatial bounds, for instance through visibly planting and maintaining a particular farm space, continuously patrolling along a park boundary or national border, or by trying to obtain recognition of the exact

boundary from other powerful authorities, such as tribal stool chiefs and the national land registration authorities¹³⁷.

How do these practices of intentionally maintained indeterminacy then compare to the concept of spatialized value? Above all I find that when the bounds of the different spaces remain fuzzy, partially obscured to many actors, it becomes difficult to ascertain the true extent of any profit margins that resourceful actors may secure for themselves. This is in some ways reflected in the common economic recognition of the relativity of value and good business sense, which holds that the cheaper you can buy and the more expensively you can sell, the greater profit margin you will be able to secure for yourself. Making the cocoa appear to represent a lower value to those you obtain it from and a higher value to those you sell it to works toward this end. This level of meaningful difference is of course part and parcel of value in the purely economic sense, where acts of exchange crucially hinge on different value perceptions. Each party to a trade needs to value a given good higher than what they will in turn need to give up in order to obtain it, or else they would find little point in pursuing an exchange in the first place.

The field of economics has since the dawn of the 20th Century attempted to divest their field of study from its prior historical associations with matters of religious and moral concerns and instead rely only on terms of numerical calculations and choices by rational actors (Graeber 2005). Despite such insistence that economic activities should be treated as entirely amoral and that the true value of a good corresponds simply to whatever someone is willing to pay for it, the materials discussed in this present context indicate rather the opposite picture. As the arguments presented by not least Bayart (1993[1989]) and Hasty (2005) have shown, in the African context value accumulation is not only a matter of how much a person may effectively prove themselves capable of obtaining; it is even more so a matter of how much value that person's social others are willing to tolerate that the person obtains. Demands for reciprocity meet those who show themselves to possess more than they need, and refusals to share may be met with social ostracization or lead to accusations of witchcraft.

Accordingly, preservation of indeterminacy in regards to the exact extents of the boundaries delimiting the dimensions of a person's available resources – their space for value creation – serves not only as a way by which individuals may extract higher profits than what appears visible to

¹³⁷ Moving out to an international scale example for a moment, it has been argued that the reason why all post-colonial African states eventually chose to maintain the inherited national borderlines once imposed by the colonizers, rather than seeking to redefine these boundaries according to ethnicity, was due to a fear of a consequent total breakdown of the young post-colonial states into a myriad of minor states (Hughes 2004).

others; it also serves as an effective shield against social norms that demand of those who have more to share with those who have less. To obtain or maintain personal wealth amid these conditions – characterized by widespread poverty among one's social peers – becomes a matter of a person's ability to effectively obtain greater profits than other people fully realize. Accordingly, in such a way the person remains able to meet social expectations towards sharing while still keeping their secret surplus.

I find that practices of cheating and corruption exemplify exactly this: deliberately maintained conditions of indeterminacy which enable a perceived boundary to seemingly appear elsewhere than where it is really enacted. The resulting margin created between the spatialized value as outwardly expressed and the spatialized value as really practiced translates in another word into profit. Across this and the previous chapters of the thesis I have identified these forms of discrepancy as practiced through cross-border smuggling, gradual land incursions, weighing scale adjustments, stab sampler horning, bribery and extortion by officials and of officials, collusion between friends and business associates, and theft by both insiders and outsiders to the Ghanaian cocoa business.

At this point I shall now turn to the concluding part of the thesis, in which I will sum up and discuss the different key points analysed and argued over the preceding five chapters.

CONCLUSION: THROUGH THE (W)HOLE OF SEFWI

The town of Sefwi Wiawso is considered the traditional home of the Sefwi tribe, and the district itself is named after the capital town of Wiawso, which is situated atop a steeply sloped hill rising above the abundant greenery below. Wiawso itself means “There is sun in the sky” in the Sefwi language, and from the paramount chief’s palace grounds on the crest of the hill, there is indeed a splendid view to the other nearby forested hills as well as to the sprawling suburban area of Dwinase in the valley below. One of the neighbouring hills visible from here is traditionally held as a sacred burial place for the Sefwi chiefs and as such it is marked as off-limits to the commercial initiatives that over the past fifty years or so have turned almost every other bit of farmable land in this district into cocoa plantations. As one of the largest regional trade and transport hubs, Sefwi Wiawso and its suburbs are almost every day bustling with activity which rises to quite a crescendo during the main crop harvest season for cocoa.

One day in March 2014 I chat with a local school teacher in this town. The teacher tells me about the history of the place and mentions that according to oral history the Sefwi tribe first came to settle in this area hundreds of years ago when they emerged from a hole in the ground on a nearby hilltop. Before the Sefwi, the Asante tribe had emerged from the same hole, but they did not think that the land here could feed them, so they returned back through the hole and instead founded the Asante kingdom at what is now Ghana’s second-largest city of Kumasi, some 150 km to the East. The Sefwi, however, liked what they saw, so they decided to stay here.

The hole is still there, the teacher adds, and he tells me that I am welcome to see it. Thus, soon after I find myself sitting in a small battered taxi along with the teacher. As the car struggles up the steep dirt road to the sacred hill, a place locally known by the name of Bosomoiso¹³⁸, we stop along the way to pick up a local woman with a baby on her back and two children at her side. They were walking back towards their farm near the hilltop and are grateful for the ride. Curiously they ask about the presence of a white man here, to which the teacher eagerly explains. Soon after at the hilltop our group turns into a small pilgrimage, as we all including the taxi driver walk the final way through a little footpath to the sacred hole.

¹³⁸ The name for the sacred site of the hole itself is ‘Bosomoi’, whereas the hill on which the hole is situated is called ‘Bosomoiso’, the latter meaning: “Bosomoi is there”.

The Bosomoi hole turns out to be situated in a little clearing in a grove behind some mud houses and it looks to be about half a meter in diameter, a roughly circular opening into the flat rocky ground. Going closer I see that it is about two meters deep, with a few shiny coins visible at the bottom amid a few scattered glass bottles and discarded plastic bags mixed with fallen leaves. Following the instructions of my companions I toss a 1 Cedi coin into the hole for good luck, and after that they eagerly encourage me to try and take a picture of the hole. As I raise my camera phone, their anticipation seems to intensify, and no sooner have I snapped a picture, before the teacher insists that I now open up the phone's picture folder to check the file. As I show them the snapshot on my phone's screen, they immediately break into an agitated discussion among themselves in Sefwi. A moment later the teacher notices the confused look on my face and goes on to explain in English that a local myth said that it was impossible to take clear pictures of the hole, but apparently this particular myth has now turned out not to be true. As we walk back to the taxi he waves his hand dismissively and says that, regardless, there are still plenty of other myths surrounding this place that remain true. For example, there are still the traces of the original footprints of the first Sefwi people that he had noticed on the rocky ground near the hole, so at least that myth is still correct.

Returning down the hill again our taxi driver picks up another passenger, a traditionally dressed middle-aged woman who is walking towards the town. The teacher discusses a bit with her in Sefwi, and then he taps my shoulder, saying that the two of them have just discussed the incident, and they have now come to agree that the reason why I successfully got the photo onto my phone must have been because I had first tossed the coin in the hole for luck, before taking the picture. Because of that, the hole had allowed the picture to be taken. Therefore, the myth regarding the spiritual power of the hole is actually still true.

I first recorded this event in my daily fieldnotes as an unexpected short diversion from the ethnographic research into the significance of cocoa across the Sefwi traditional area. However, despite the immediate absence of this particular natural good from the events of the visit as well as from the myths associated with the hole, there is something about the Bosomoi place and its mythical significance to the Sefwi people that has since then repeatedly made me recall and reflect upon it. The hole is locally considered to represent a direct linkage between two geographically distant places, two neighbouring tribal groups, as well as a linkage between the material and the spiritual realms, and also a linkage between the past and the present history of the Sefwi people. Peculiarly, I have later come to notice how these characteristics regarding the Bosomoi myth also link together the multiple topics analysed over the course of this thesis. I have therefore arranged the present concluding chapter

according to four topical sections, each framed and linked to the others by comparison to the Bosomoi myth. The topics are as follows: A) emergent and enclosing spaces, B) singular and multiple spaces, C) dynamic and static spaces, and finally D) solid and permeable boundaries. Afterwards, I will conclude with a final summation of the many issues discussed in relation to the value of Ghanaian cocoa.



Image 63: The Bosomoi sacred hole near Sefwi Wiawso. Photo taken in March 2014 by this text's author with the locally interpreted permission of the Bosomoi spiritual presence.

Emergent and Enclosing Spaces

The mythological designation of Bosomoi as the point of origin of the entire Sefwi ethnic lineage exemplifies the perception of entities that extend themselves outward in space from a single point of emergence rather than being defined through enclosing territorial boundary lines. As I have discussed through Chapters 2 and 3, the pre-colonial West African conception of ethnic and political powers was primarily based on this very idea of radiant power centres that gradually diffused or lapsed into contested or orphaned frontier zones or 'marches' around their outer peripheries. The adverse

approach to territorial divisions, the concept of encircled spaces defined by outer boundary lines, was also recognised in this regional West African tradition, something which in the Sefwi terminology is being referred to as *twama* [carving out] and which to this day not least becomes utilized in relation to designations of land plots for housing or farming purposes (Awanyo 1998). The emergent approach to spatial claims, in Sefwi termed *doko* [proceed onward/outward], was likely until the mid-20th Century sufficient for most practical purposes of assigning and managing individual household farmlands as well as the various local Sefwi village communities, and perhaps even also the overall territory of this ethnic group. However, once the historically low population density across the Sefwi territory changed through the massive immigration of prospective cocoa farmers into this region in the latter half of the 20th Century, the need for enclosing rather than open-ended demarcations of individual land rights also became increasingly necessary. As I have suggested, this changing perception of available geographical spaces can be compared to the way that the European colonial powers over the final decades of the 19th Century adapted their own perceptions of their African territorial ambitions from a basis in ‘spheres of interest’ to a basis in unambiguously defined geographical boundary lines.

I have found that the contemporary resilience of Ghanaian perceptions of entities as spatially emergent rather than entirely constant should not be interpreted as any form of old-fashioned backwardness, still not superseded by developments in the form of modern civilization as envisioned through the lens of Enlightenment natural science, either colonial or post-colonial. In this regard I have concurred with the objections of Hill’s classical (1997 [1963]) study of south Ghanaian migrant cocoa farmers. However, unlike Hill, my own present studies have not enabled me to fully agree with her conclusion that the expansionary entrepreneurship among such cocoa farmers ought to characterize them as rural capitalists instead. Capitalism as a concept, I have found, does not adequately account for all the factors involved in Sefwi-Akan ways of generating value through the many engagements of people with cocoa. The insufficiency, as I have argued, is first of all due to the concurrent perception of space as radiant and emergent rather than only enclosing and definite.

As I have argued through reference to other studies (Wilks 1993, 1992; Awanyo 1998; Verran 2001) this foundational dynamism also involves the replacement of the primacy of numbers as referents to universal absolutes with numbers as indicators of parts-wholes. Dimensions of geographical space become contingent on performances of human bodily movement, for instance the livelihoods of cocoa truckers on the Ghanaian roads, similar to how the extent of the Asante kingdom was once understood as twenty-one days of travel outward from its capital city, effectively the reach of its warriors to enforce the Asantehene’s authority (hence, the claim that Greater Asante extended over

a geographical space, the diameter of which was principally defined as forty days of travel, corresponding with one month according to the traditional Asante forty-two day calendar (Wilks 1993: 200-201)). Likewise, movement principally dictates the effective size of emergent *doko* style farm plots; the farmer continues until the need for subsistence or surplus has been fulfilled, the limits to the bodily abilities of the farm household members to manage the farm, or until some outside criteria is met (i.e. encountering a neighboring farmer's land or another delimiting feature of the terrain). The *twama* farm type is also defined through human bodily movements, in this case the physical walk of grantor, grantee, and witnesses around the plot about to be awarded. In each case, the boundaries of geographical spaces remain inherently dynamic as personal or outside agency both may lead to subsequent expansion or contraction of its dimensions.

Despite the contemporary situation where no more unclaimed land remains accessible to people across southwestern Ghana, I have discussed how the propensity to treat territorial claims as emergent rather than enclosing has not been replaced by adherence to spatially fixed definitions. As demonstrated by Berry (2001), Asante chiefs continue to practice the tradition of inherently expansive spatial claims by intentionally refraining from specifying the exact boundaries of the lands they consider theirs, unless when they find direct advantage from doing so. As Boni (2008) and England (1993) have also shown, the ongoing cases of land disputes recorded among contemporary Sefwi chiefs and farmers likewise indicate that the same principle of emergent spatial claims remains practiced here among the Asante's immediate tribal neighbours to the west. I have furthermore suggested that this expansionary approach to land use can also be observed today among individual farm households, most evidently expressed across my fieldwork area through the examples of the nationally designated nature preservation areas of Bia National Park, Krokosua Hills, and Bia Tawya, where the latter two areas in particular have become encroached upon by expansionary spatial agency of cocoa farmers over the past fifty years or so.

Effectively, I find that in Ghana maintenance of any personal or institutional claim to a particular plot of land becomes very much a matter of repeated actions to reaffirm one's utilisation of the place and thereby to defend the outer boundaries of it. Recurrent payment of tributes to the chiefly stools that have once granted a person a particular land use is one such form of activity. Another form of spatial claims maintenance I have observed through the physical stationing and frequent perimeter patrol movements of Ghanaian and Ivoirian border officials, as well as the patrols by Bia National Park rangers in order to prevent boundary encroaching activities by neighbouring farmers or incursions by hunters, loggers, miners, or smugglers. Likewise, the continued efforts of some cocoa farmers to try

and deter elephant incursions coupled with their periodic ritual sacrifices and prayers to maintain the tolerance and protection from nature spirits furthermore exemplify such ongoing efforts to maintain the dimensions of a given spatial claim. Again, this sentiment is very clearly expressed in the Ghanaian proverb that *if one does not accompany their uncle to the farm, the boundary of the farm will be crooked*, i.e. outsiders may otherwise effectively encroach into parts of a household's land.

Singular and Multiple Spaces

On a material level I consider it likely that the Sefwi mythical linkage of the Bosomoi hole with Kumasi may refer to the sacred grove of Asantemanso some 35 km south of the contemporary Kumasi city centre, an archaeological site which according to anthropologist R.S. Rattray in the early 20th Century had been presented to him by the Asante as the place where “the first human beings [...] came forth from the ground” (Rattray 1923: 121)¹³⁹. At some other places in Ghana, for instance near the towns of Wenchi and Techiman in Brong-Ahafo Region to the north of Sefwi, people have also referred to their ancestors as having originally emerged from holes in the ground (Ofori 2004: 141), or, as in other cases elsewhere in southern Ghana, descended from the sky (Berry 2001: 152; Wilks 1993: 66-67). As discussed in Chapter 3 this enduringly popular tradition of references to mythical lineage origins beyond places in the material realm is closely linked to the practices of Ghanaian customary law. This body of legal principles recognises claims to land based on oral history, a form of argument which is difficult, if not impossible to refute. References to mythical origin stories, whether those involve arrivals from the earth or the sky, set the stage for a type of “we were here first” arguments that work to preclude others from calling you a stranger on a section of land which you want to claim as rightfully yours (Berry 2009: 25; 2001).

In my interpretation, the myth that the Sefwi people came to this area only after the Asante had first considered it for habitation may be understood to imply two things: first, it indicates that the Sefwi claim to traditional ownership of this land rests on the prior decision of the Asante to rescind their claims to it. Secondly, the myth may refer to the historical subservient relationship of the Sefwi to the Asante kingdom, to which the Sefwi from the 18th until the late 19th Century had acted as a vassal state (Daaku 1971). This inter-tribal hierarchy was to some degree nullified through the later

¹³⁹ See also Prempeh (2003).

British recognition of the Sefwi kingdom as a British protectorate, following the Sefwi support of the British colonial military campaigns against the Asante in the closing decades of the 19th Century (see Chapter 3).

Within the Sefwi geographical area, the hierarchical and multi-layered understanding of land rights, however, is widely practiced to this day, not least since traditional tribal authority remains recognised in the Ghanaian national constitution. The paramount chief residing in Sefwi Wiawso rules over two area chiefs in the towns of Boinzan and Debiso. However, as Boni (2000) has shown, the question of hierarchy remains actively contested among these traditional Sefwi authorities, where some people in Boinzan have pointed to some versions of oral history that speak of this community as autochthonous and hence cast doubt on their proclaimed subservience to Wiawso¹⁴⁰. Likewise, the chieftancy in Debiso has expressed rebellious sentiments against the supposedly superior status of Wiawso by pointing to versions of oral history where both Debiso and Wiawso appear equally subservient to the Asante (ibid: 573-74). In any case, as England has argued, the Ghanaian customary law remains unclear as to which degree such area chiefs have the right to decide allocations of land plots independently of their paramount chief (England 1993: 166).

Above all of these claims to land rights rest furthermore the traditional Akan cosmological understanding that all of existence is comprised of two foundational co-present and overlapping realms, ‘nea wohu’ [that which you see] and ‘nea wonhu’ [that which you do not see], where the latter in turn refers to the realm of the spirits and with both realms ruled over by the supreme being, ‘Nyankopon’ (McCaskie 1995; Minkus 1980; Meyerowitz 1951).

Effectively, land rights across Ghana are in this tradition administered hierarchically and stay concurrently claimable by multiple actors, rather than being administered horizontally in the form of having land rights assigned to only one true legal owner at a time. Each rights holder therefore preserves their own claim to a given area of land, even as they may choose to delegate its further use to others. This way, each spatial allocation of land remains inherently prone to contestant claims from multiple angles, as multiple legal claimants, as well as the chiefly hierarchical order itself and the exact extents of any actor’s claims to authority, may become challenged. The overall national ownership claim

¹⁴⁰ To note, this unclarity over claims to historical superiority appears to also have been reflected in the academic literature. Both Austin (2005: xxi) and McCaskie (1995: 32) indicate Wiawso on their maps as a prominent settlement along the pre-colonial nineteenth century Asante southwestern high road route out of Kumasi, omitting any indication of Boinzan, whereas Wilks (1973: 11) instead indicates Boinzan [Bonzina] on his map of the same high road system of that era, omitting any indication of Wiawso.

made by the contemporary nation state of Ghana complicates all such matters further, as the constitutional recognition of both tribal and national authorities has so far effectively prevented legal resolution of the numerous cases where different authorities have parcelled the same land out in different dimensions and allocated it to different actors for different purposes of use. Across my fieldwork area I have found that the most extreme case of this type of discrepancy, without doubt, is the case of the governmentally demarcated Bia Tawya Forest Reserve, which has been effectively parcelled out by the Sefwi area chief of Boinzan, and which today hosts numerous cocoa farming communities, including the village of Topman (as detailed in Chapter 1) and the town of Bonsu Nkwanta (as detailed in Chapter 4).

As it stands, I find that the continued recognition of the Bosomoi sacred hole and the associated myths of its spiritual powers further point to the persistence of the Akan cosmological understanding of a world concurrently composed of a spiritual and a material realm with both aspects superimposed onto the same terrain. This perception of spaces as multi-layered remains practiced even as the material terrain of the Sefwi region over the past half a century has been radically transformed from mostly wild growing tropical forest frontier to mostly monocrop cocoa plantations.

Dynamic and Static Spaces

The Bosomoi Hole appears on one level as a specific material location, part and parcel of the surrounding geographical terrain, and yet at the same time the Sefwi myths of its spiritual powers recount how it has shown itself capable of defying any regular confines of the material realm by instantly whisking groups of people from one place to another, or furthermore by spoiling attempts to take photographic images of its appearance. In its spiritual nature Bosomoi is attributed with agency and the ability to dynamically extend itself beyond the immediate confines of its material dimensions.

As first described through the ethnographic case that served as the initial introduction to the topic of this thesis, the River Bia is likewise recognised across Sefwi as a powerful spiritual entity, whose powers enable it to reach beyond its material confines amid the river banks, not least if called upon through reckless acts of cursing or challenges enacted by humans. Over the course of this thesis I have proceeded to analyse a number of other interplays between understandings of entities and bounded spaces as static on one side and dynamic on the other.

Among the primary forms of statically bound spaces discussed are the geographical impositions placed across the Sefwi-Akan terrain in the form of the international political boundary line towards Côte d'Ivoire as well as the various boundaries set to impose distinctions between areas of cocoa agriculture and areas of protected nature. Static boundaries have likewise been imposed through the implementation of a systematic approach to cocoa production in the form of a commodity chain enacted by both Ghanaian business and state actors. The boundaries defined through the commodity chain approach operate with fixed definitions regarding which types of actors get to become recognised as part of the chain network, along with the assigned range of work tasks delegated to each such actor, and the specific points by which and to whom any given actor should then pass on the cocoa they have processed. Only a very limited set of actors are granted the formal recognition as rightfully present within these solidly set systemic boundaries, and forms of activities – between different actors and cocoa – which do not conform to the predefined framework of the system are thus either ignored or problematized – the latter especially in such cases where those other forms of activities lead to perceived losses of value principally claimed by the commodity chain owners and administrators.

Similarly, the fixed domestic price on cocoa imposed annually or bi-annually by the Ghanaian government stabilizes the relation between one 64 kg bag of cocoa and 212 GH¢,¹⁴¹ even as monetary inflation of the currency over the same period of time effectively reduces the purchasing power compared to other available goods. This latter case shows how a static boundary reproduction to one side may obscure an effective dynamic encroachment into domestic farmers' and purchasers' relative spaces for value generation from another side.

Dynamically bound spaces I have found enacted almost everywhere across my Ghanaian fieldwork. From the lax national border enforcement around Topman village (Chapter 1), through the movement of people and goods along the road network of Ghana (Chapter 2), to the emergent, flexible, and inherently contestable understandings of land rights (Chapter 3). Then again also along people's vestments of hopes and faith in the possibility of miraculous or ludic ways to achieve desired future wealth that seemingly remains impossible to reach through the more static or cyclical confines of an everyday life in poverty (Chapter 4). Finally, there I have also explored the perception of spaces as dynamic through acts of cheating and corruption (Chapter 5).

Perhaps here, in all of these interplays between the dynamic and the static, one may also find the elusive final cocoa frontier nowadays – a frontier as an imagined and practiced unregulated

¹⁴¹ The official purchasing prices between Oct. 2012 and Oct. 2014.

space, a dynamic flexible margin where advantage can be successfully pursued by those opportunistic persons who spot forgotten corners, blind angles, and non-commensurable gaps for potential profits between the spaces for value creation already recognised and claimed by others.

Solid and Permeable Boundaries

The Bosomoi hole is in a mythological and spiritual understanding connected to Kumasi, and the spirit route follows an ephemeral yet seemingly instantaneous path that avoids the long meandering traversal necessary through the physical terrain, a distance that even today could take some five hours or more to cover with a motorized vehicle. Bosomoi, in a way, links Sefwi Wiawso and Kumasi almost semiotically; as an instantiation of meaningful difference between a ‘here’ and ‘there’. In another view Bosomoi links through mythical and spiritual attributions two spatial localities that people recognise as related, yet where the geographical distances between them mean that to people in one place the other place remains mostly out of sight.

Ingold (2015, 2007) has argued for the use of ‘lines’ as a way to understand the movement of entities through their life worlds. In this terminology lines representing the lives of others are only partially visible to one actor as they move through different trajectories beyond one’s own direct experiential vantage point. I would suggest that such lines in the context of not only Sefwi and Asante traditions but also to contemporary Ghanaian cocoa workers can even be perceived as taking on appearances as ‘dotted’ rather than contiguous; of disappearing from view and reappearing, seemingly, again later on and a further distance.

For instance, consider the cocoa that disappears from the farmlands under the tarpaulins of the departing trucks. It reappears somewhat again in the radio broadcasts and newspaper comments on national prices, exports, international markets, corruption charges, and the like. Then it disappears into the portside containers and the waiting ships off the coast and only reappears again in the form of images and imaginings of “white people” afar, as well as the limited number of cocoa-containing chocolate products that make their way back to the markets and town shops around the rural cocoa frontier. In between each instantiation there are presumably linear connections, yet these parts are all fraught with unknown sections, devoid of direct contact. Myths may serve to fill out these voids where experiential knowledge remains absent or obscured. The Sefwi population is related to the Asante and

other Akan tribes, yet the exact connection is not – or no longer – explicable. The Bosomoi hole at Sefwi Wiawso serves in this perspective as a spiritual, mythical point of connection that ties together populations across distances. The first Sefwi tribal group, if likening them to a bundle of individual lines in Ingold's terminology (*ibid*), arrived here in the material realm at Sefwi Wiawso similarly to how a thread would emerge from a hole in a fabric, the underside of which would then correspond to the underlying spiritual realm. Elsewhere, in material realm Kumasi, the line emerges again, linking the people together in spirit despite their geographical separation.

A strong power associated with the Akan spirit realm is the capability to reach beyond by permeating or ignoring any boundaries imposed across the material realm. This, as I have discussed in Chapter 4, is one of the allures of the 'money rituals' and other forms of spiritual assistance offered by spiritualist practitioners in Western Ghana. With spiritual aid a person may gain access to a shortcut that bypasses the experienced spatio-temporal boundaries between that person's present poverty and their dreams of future wealth. I find that many Ghanaians seem to apply such desires for opportunistic shortcuts to many aspects of their everyday lives – and cocoa has often come to represent a connecting opportunity hub for these purposes; a means for getting ahead. While some put their faith in superior powers to help them move forward in life, others instead seek to rely on their own ingenuity. In Chapter 5 I have explored many of the ways in which personal agency in the form of acts of cheating and corruption has become a way to generate personal wealth across the entire Ghanaian cocoa business from farmlands to ports.

Cross-border cocoa smuggling as well as the secret uses of cocoa stab samplers at depots both exemplify ways in which some people have succeeded in making supposedly solid boundaries turn porous instead. By moving cocoa across the border to Côte d'Ivoire or by tampering with the contents of already tested, sealed, and approved cocoa bags actors become able to extract and materialize potential monetary value for themselves, which state or business owners have otherwise sought to claim for themselves through their boundary impositions. As discussed in Chapter 5, the actions of the many different people trying to generate money through the Ghanaian cocoa transport sector, despite their formal exteriority to the commodity chain from the perspective of the authorities, likewise appear as an ongoing struggle between people attempting to make the imposed commodity chain boundaries either more or less permeable.

Spatiality and the Value of Cocoa

This finally brings me back to the overall question concerning the value of cocoa in Ghana. I have proposed the use of the term I call ‘spatialized value’, since the conditions of value creation across my fieldwork area express characteristics that are different from the conditions most commonly considered in academic value literature.

The various academic approaches to value, as discussed in Chapter 2, have focused on the movement of commercial goods across boundaries understood as moments of transaction, while the spatial dimensions of the goods themselves remain practically unchanged. The commodity chain approach in particular is deeply premised on this. Academic contention on value theory has meanwhile tended to revolve around the issue of whether value should be treated as an alienable or an inalienable quality of the material good in question. While the academic discussants have largely agreed to the inherently ephemeral and dynamic characteristics of value itself, the materiality of the goods enabling or expressing such value has in turn been largely assumed to remain constant and a moot point of discussion. Material goods and properties appear in these contexts as particular classifiable types of entities with certain qualities and spatial dimensions, all of which can be objectively measured and defined.

However, I have found that the ways in which cocoa becomes valuable across my Ghanaian fieldwork setting necessitates an analytical approach that is capable of acknowledging that both value and space (of commercial goods as well as of land) to people there are understood as dynamic and emergent.

Spaces and boundaries are both seen as inherently dynamic in the sense of being porous and moveable, and only through efforts of some actors do they sometimes appear as solid. The movements of boundaries may lead to encroachments into spaces claimed by other actors, overlapping spatial claims, or vacuous areas between spaces. Fixed dimensions of a space and solid boundaries in turn require deliberate and recurrent effort to uphold.

Maintenance of overall indeterminacy serves a crucial function for value creation, as it eases the creation of marginal spaces between boundaries as outwardly declared and boundaries as actually performed. Such intentionally made incommensurability enables the creation of marginal value gains for those actors who can take advantage thereof. Any numerical attribution is also form of a

boundary demarcation, and throughout the cocoa business of Ghana everybody knows – or should know – that publicly expressed number indications cannot be trusted at their face value.

All across Ghana conditions of uncertainty persist through the traditionally contestable land rights and dynamic boundary demarcations, flexible weight and price measurements, along with many not formally acknowledged relations and collaborations between people all contribute to situations where individuals and collectives repeatedly need to reaffirm or renegotiate their rights to shares of the spaces and resources, rather than rely on definitions firmly set once and for all. A characteristic of these inherently dynamic conditions can, to my view, be likened to human bodily acts of gently and persistently pushing against others in a crowd, of exerting or yielding to pressures, and of staying ready and alert to quickly reposition oneself into the occupation of any extra space that might open up. I hope with this imagery it should be possible to recognize the analytical comparison I have previously made to Latour's (2013) take on 'Gaia theory' and its concept of a world consisting of innumerable actors always in the process of brushing up against, encroaching upon, or yielding to one another (see Chapter 2). Permanently fixed boundaries stifle movement, locks in positions, and hamper options for future expansionary movement, even as the same boundaries also protect what is currently recognized as being there. Expansionary movement entails expressions of force that effectively push the dimensions of one space for potential value creation into spaces of others, who in turn have to resist, yield, or become absorbed.

Throughout my fieldwork area of Ghana I have found an opportunistic readiness among people to perform expansionary pushing in all of life's aspects, material as immaterial, to enhance their own entanglements with property, interpersonal connections and resources, and the prestige associated therewith. To obtain success a person recognises a need to create for them self a margin of opportunity for profit, a certain space for value creation, the dimensions of which are in fact larger than what it appears so to others. Preservation of indeterminacy, keeping some wealth and resources hidden from view of others, can help a person accomplish this. If others know that someone is in possession of extensive resources they will call on norms of social responsibility towards family, friends, or local or ethnic ties to try and make that person share with them, leaving the wealthy individual to choose between redistributing their excess gains between others or becoming socially ostracized if insisting on keeping them. To navigate these expectations towards social obligations without alienating one's social networks, a person needs to carefully manage how much they reveal to others that they actually have – and in turn how much they therefore need to share with those others.

My suggestion is that ‘spatialized value’ as analytics may potentially encompass value expressed as concurrently numerical and ephemeral, essential and relational, a matter of facts and a matter of feelings. Therefore, overall the value of cocoa can be approached as a notion that depends on certain conceptualizations of space, and furthermore that increases in value can come about through either expansions of already perceived boundaries or movement across boundaries. It is on this background that I have proposed to treat value as spatialized and in turn that the value of cocoa in Ghana can be understood as a dynamic complex of spatio-temporal boundaries of differences enacted among numerous different actors.

MISCELLANY

List of Abbreviations used throughout the Thesis:

AEO	Agricultural Extension Officer.
BPU	Border Patrol Unit. A subdivision under GIS (Ghana Immigration Service).
CEPS	Customs Excise and Preventive Service. Subdivision under GRA (Ghana Revenue Authority).
CHED	Cocoa Health and Extension Division. Ghanaian state institution under COCOBOD working to improve the outputs of cocoa farms by teaching farmers and by carrying out treatments against plant diseases and pests.
CMB	Cocoa Marketing Board. The governmental agency preceding COCOBOD from 1947 to 1979.
CMC	Cocoa Marketing Company. The Ghanaian state agency handling all cocoa sales and exports to the world markets. A subsidiary of COCOBOD.
COCOBOD	Cocoa Board of Ghana. The Ghanaian governmental agency in charge of the overall cocoa production sector of the country. COCOBOD is a direct subsidiary under the Ghanaian Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP).
CRIG	Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana. Governmental research institution under COCOBOD, conducting research into the development and maintenance of the national cocoa production.
GH¢	Ghanaian Cedis. The official currency of Ghana.
GIS	Ghana Immigration Service. Agency under the Ghanaian Ministry of the Interior charged with protecting and regulating traffic across the international borders of Ghana.
GRA	Ghana Revenue Authority. Government agency under MoFEP (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning).
GSB	Ghana Standards Board.
LBC	Licensed Buying Company.
LPC	Licensed Purchasing Clerk.
PBC	The Produce Buying Company. The former Ghanaian state-run cocoa purchasing company that now acts as a privatized LBC.
QCC	Quality Control Company (formerly the Quality Control Division). Ghanaian governmental institution handling all domestic cocoa quality control tests and certifications. A subsidiary of COCOBOD.
QCO	Quality Control Officer.
SPD	Seed Production Division. A subsidiary of COCOBOD.

A Note on Currency:

Throughout this thesis I apply an exchange rate of 3.20 GH¢ to 1.00 USD. The value of the Ghanaian Cedi fluctuated quite significantly over the course of my fieldwork periods in 2014 and 2015 (and has continued to do so afterwards), but this rate corresponds quite accurately to the value at the time most of my data was collected.

A Note on Names:

Many people have contributed to the contents of this work, and I have attempted to give exact credit by name whenever applicable. However, some of my contacts have also provided types of information that might result in negative repercussions for themselves, if their real names were to be linked to the exact activities or locations they described or showed to me. Therefore, in a few cases I have chosen to either replace the names such informants with aliases, or otherwise simply omit the use of their names altogether. As a rule of thumb, if any named person in this thesis has been described in connection with any activity of dubious legality, presume that their names and identities have been anonymized in the text.

A Note on Photos:

All photos in the present work have been taken by the work's author, except where credited elsewhere.

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