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Disciplined Development: Teachers and Reform in Ghana

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Lexington Books

Introduction

Ambivalent Partners

Part of my work as a lecturer at Peki Training College in Ghana in 2000-2001 was to teach “modern” or progressive methods of teaching. Teacher trainees said that they learned a lot during my lessons. A student in my social studies methods course, Edem, said, “Anytime you have come to the class comparing your way of teaching to maybe that of the Ghanaian I can see a slight difference in it, in that you always try to lead the class very lively not teacher-centered.” Another student, Destiny, added, “How you approached the teaching you had during the demonstration lesson, that one alone has taught us a lot.” Despite their supportive words, the trainees for the most part ignored the practices I preached. My ideas were not meaningless to them—they were already learning about progressive methods from their tutors and textbooks. But the specter of “indiscipline” limited the extent to which teachers would implement reforms. As another trainee, Kumah, put it, “the democratic way of teaching would give room to pupils to misbehave by saying anything at all.” For educators, Ghana’s future development—indeed, its survival as a nation—required certain behaviors and attitudes, and thus particular kinds of teaching.

Ghanaian teachers’ fears of indiscipline, and striving toward discipline, help explain how and why they teach the way they do: their routines for conducting class, expectations for children’s behavior, the content of lessons. Moreover, by enforcing strict morality and hard work among schoolchildren, teachers appear to “consent” to the terms for development set by the international aid community (Gramsci in Forgacs 2000, 306-307). Ghana’s leaders have decided, under strong pressure, to adopt institutions and values promoted by the United States government and the World Bank as necessary for development: neo-liberal economics and liberal democracy, Christian morals and work ethic, scientific rationalism. Teachers are keenly aware of these demands and understand that acts of indiscipline, such as election fraud and civil unrest, scare away investors and tourists. In schools, they work hard to prevent the indiscipline they attribute to fellow citizens, especially “illiterates” from “remote” areas. These “local power relations” make possible certain discourses—in this case, about the importance of national discipline—that support larger “strategies” of power, like the drive for new markets or sources of cheap labor (Foucault 1978, 97). At these times, teachers become the “partners” that donors and lenders seek to carry out their impositions.
Yet this partnership is contingent and ambivalent. In their lessons about history and culture, teachers "expose" power and "render it fragile" (Foucault 1978, 101) by portraying "friendly" Africans as superior to "white men" who "deceived" Africans during colonization and who continue to control them through their loans. Children are told "we must do things to help ourselves" rather than depend on foreigners (Baku, Ballans, and Omutile 1991a, 56). Teachers' work is therefore not simply reproductive of global power arrangements—discipline is necessary and important because it could provide the means by which the country will finally achieve independence.

Discipline and Indiscipline in Schools and the Nation

This book is based on my experiences as a tutor at Peki Training College in the Volta Region of Ghana during 2000-2001. I returned to visit former colleagues and students in December 2004 and January 2005. During my first, year-long stay, I worked as a Teachers for Africa (TFA) volunteer for a non-governmental organization, the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH). IFESH was founded in 1984 by the late Reverend Leon H. Sullivan, an African American leader, to combat hunger, illiteracy, unemployment, and poor health care in developing countries. The Teachers for Africa program aims to improve education by sending teachers to teach in African countries for one or two years. The Foundation paid for our transportation to and from Africa and provided volunteers with a monthly stipend. Volunteers have been working in Ghana since 1992 and, when I was there, were assigned to teach English and pedagogy at nine of the forty-two training colleges for primary and junior secondary school teachers. Volunteers in Ghana also coordinated resource rooms that housed computers and laminating machines provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the primary funder of IFESH.

At Peki, I taught social studies methods classes to second year students and English grammar to first year students. In one of my initial lessons, I asked students to role play a presentation of their grievances about campus life to the principal. The student playing the principal dismissed the petitioners' complaints, shouting, "You are being trained to be teachers, therefore you must be disciplined!" After that, I began noticing frequent references to discipline in class discussions, public speeches, and newspaper articles and wondered why this concept was so important to teachers and others in Ghana. The meanings of discipline and indiscipline seemed to fall into two broad categories. First, these terms could refer to collective acts, as when people engaged in national indiscipline like bribery, corruption, or ethnic violence. For example, Vice President Alhaji Aliu Mahama started a national campaign against littering and public urination. In a letter to the editor of one of the largest daily papers, August Evelyn Sefakor worried that the campaign "had very little effect on Ghana because there is still so much indiscipline in our society" (2005, 10).

Discipline or indiscipline could also describe the actions of individuals, such as their behaviors, work ethic, or social graces. Actions were manifestations of the moral or intellectual qualities of a person—for example, a disciplined teacher followed her lesson plan and was able to resist the temptations of drugs and alcohol. These forms of discipline appeared to be related to indigenous understandings about how morality is expressed. Many people believed that bodily habits were "deeply intertwined" with, and expressive of, "psychological outlook." Among Anlo-Ewe people, for example, morality was revealed in the way one moved in addition to character: "Your character, your moral fortune is embodied in the way you move, and the way you move embodies an essence of your nature" (Geurts 2002, 75-76).

Their understandings of discipline made many Ghanaians receptive to Christian and neo-liberal arguments that individual or national transformation can lead to salvation and development. In this reasoning, causes of underdevelopment are found internally—in individuals or groups of people—not in power arrangements. For example, teachers often characterized people from villages as indisciplined—they were easily corrupted or did not appreciate the value of education. One student complained that the votes of "illiterates" were easily bought and argued that such people should not be allowed to vote, let alone run for office as allowed in the constitution. In assessing their teaching experiences, former students I visited in 2004 explained that though people in the villages where they worked were invariably kind, they did not "cherish learning." Disinterest in schools was somehow related to the "backwardness" of the area—the people had no aspirations beyond farming or, in the southern Volta village where one trainee was posted, were more interested in "fetish." By blaming these forms of indiscipline for Ghana's lack of democracy or development, teachers joined with their leaders and external donors and lenders in the task of disciplining Africans.

Visions of Development

In 1957, Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from its colonizer, Great Britain. As in other post-colonial African countries, the nation has struggled to achieve political and economic stability. Recently there have been hopeful steps toward democracy. The high turnout, civility, and clear winner in the 2000 presidential election inspired national pride in this editor of the Daily Graphic:

"We acknowledge that there cannot be a completely flawless election anywhere on the face of this globe, including advanced and matured democracies with hundreds of years of existence such as the United States of America, which, even in recent times, is still grappling with declaring a winner a month after polls closed. For us in the emerging democracies, the difficulties can only be real. It is in this respect that we ought to put ourselves on the back and be justifiably proud for this rather impressive start." (2000, 7)
The 2000 elections marked the third consecutive election under the 1992 constitution and led to the defeat of the long-time ruling party, the National Democratic Council (NDC), by John Kufuor of the National Patriotic Party (NPP). Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings of the NDC had been in power for almost twenty years. In response to pressure from the World Bank, Rawlings had presided over the adoption of a constitution in 1992 and won two elections. As Rawlings was constitutionally limited to two terms, John Atta Mills represented the NDC in 2000. After a run-off between the two major candidates in 2000—neither received the required fifty percent plus one vote needed to win the first election—the concession of the ruling party to the opposition was a welcome break from a cycle of military coups, civilian regimes, and counter-coups that have marked Ghana's history since independence. President Kufuor's election led a New York Times editor to declare that Ghana was "a welcome African example of legitimate democracy" (2001). Kufuor was re-elected in December 2004.

During the cold war, Ghana was patronized by both the Soviet Union and the United States. African leaders used this rivalry to "maximize aid and minimize constraints" in an "unlaided diplomatic achievement" (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 116-119). Different regimes experimented with socialist as well as capitalist measures—Ghana's first leader, Kwame Nkrumah, characterized himself as a "Christian Marxist" (Dickson 1993, 149). The decline of the Soviet Union narrowed the range of development visions to those of the United States and the World Bank, whose officials establish complementary policies and, lately, tie aid to the fulfillment of particular policies. Other aid-givers tend to go along with their goals, further homogenizing the development agenda (Brock-Utne 2000, 16 and 71).

The philosophy of neo-liberalism, or "free market fundamentalism" (Stiglitz 2002), became hegemonic in the development community in the 1980s, when World Bank analysts blamed African governments and corruption for their economic woes. To solve economic problems, the World Bank and USAID recommend that governments be "downsized" by cutting or privatizing services, eliminating subsidies and wage and price controls, and reducing trade barriers. Free market remedies are believed to solve all kinds of problems, including those in education: "Competition for students will tend to encourage experimentation in public and private schools alike, and the result should be increased efficiency in the education system" (World Bank 1988, 67). The "juristic" discourses of democracy and equality (Foucault 1980) are used to persuade people to accept "development hegemony" (Kamat 2002) while mystifying the capitalist sources driving these reforms. For example, neo-liberal economic programs are presented as empowering to local people who are urged to gain a "sense of ownership" (World Bank 1999, 18) of policies that are designed to facilitate investment by multinational corporations. Meanwhile, neo-liberalism remains controversial or unproven in other settings—legislators in the United States face strong opposition when they try to eliminate tariffs and the benefits of introducing competition among schools are inconclusive (Winerip 2003).

In Ghana, neo-liberal policies were promoted in the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program adopted in 1983. An economic crisis forced President Rawlings to seek assistance from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. In addition to economic and political reform, bank officials recommended new educational policies to improve the "quality" of basic or primary education while increasing the "efficiency" of school financing (that is, decrease government expenditures) (World Bank 1995, 2-3). Toward that end, educational reforms passed in 1987 reduced the period of state-supported education at the secondary level (equivalent to high school) from four to three years. Since the educational reforms were passed, international donors and lenders have funded nine percent of the annual overall education budget and fifteen percent of basic education. This support will continue "if the favourable attitude of external donors to the new educational initiative is sustained" (Ghana Ministry of Education 1996, 2). In other words, there are strong financial incentives for Ghanaian leaders to continue to implement donors and lenders' reforms.

My work at Peki was linked to the 1987 reforms that called for the teaching of progressive methods at training colleges. Like many in the international education community (see e.g., Samoff 1999, 73), IFESH officials argue that "banking" or traditional methods of teaching prevail in Africa. The pedagogical methods of Teachers for Africa volunteers were therefore assumed to be different from, and better than, those of Africans. As the job manual explained, volunteers were to "train colleagues to use modern methods of instruction: for example, encouraging interactive rather than rote learning and using handouts in addition to textbooks" (IFESH, 1999). Arguments used to justify educational reforms linked underdevelopment to the alleged indiscipline of Africans—they have too many children, they cling to traditional ways, etc. For example, according to USAID, the funder of IFESH-Ghana, modern education will facilitate political stability, reduce fertility, help citizens develop "more modern attitudes," and increase productivity (1991, 65). An IFESH-Ghana brochure explains: "IFESH believes (confirmed by scholarly studies) that education plays a significant role in promoting economic growth, nation building and social change. Studies have also shown that formal education has a strong positive correlation with the physical quality of life including lower child mortality, lower fertility" (IFESH n.d.).

While few would deny the importance of education, aid-givers ascribe miraculous powers to schools. As Anyon argues in her study of urban education in the United States, schooling alone is insufficient to overcome the structural causes of inequality and poverty (1997). In addition, the link between teaching pedagogies and democracy is problematic. Cuban found that high schools in the United States remain teacher-centered, not progressive and student centered (1993). Other researchers have noted that U.S. social studies teachers appear to focus primarily on teaching facts and information, not generating debate or discussing ideas as is supposed to happen in modern and democratic classrooms (Hess 2004; McNeill 1986).
The privileging of modern over traditional methods is derived from the philosophies of John Dewey (1997), considered the “father” of progressive education. In the United States, progressive education grew out of reform movements in the late 1800s and early 1900s. From the beginning, the progressive education “movement manifested itself in a remarkable diversity of pedagogical protest and innovation” (Cremin 1964, 22). What united progressive reformers was a hostility to traditional education and its focus on developing “mental discipline” through rote learning. They questioned the definition of “an educated man,” claiming that an emphasis on classical languages and literature was “useless” in an era of industrialization and high immigration (Cremin 1964, 48). Applying social Darwinism, German romanticism, and emerging scientific principles to the study of children (Reese 2001), reformers advocated that teachers discard recitation and lecture in favor of “hands-on” learning, which was believed to be more relevant and practical for rural and urban workers (Kliebard 1995, 1-25).

Today, traditional pedagogies are posited as a cause of dictatorship and underdevelopment. Harber contends that authoritarian teaching methods in Africa perpetuate autocratic regimes (1997, 40). Researchers in West Africa found that “abstract” or rote teaching methods have “directly contribut[ed] to poor academic achievement, low self-esteem, and aptitudes ill-suited for eventual entry into the world of work” (MacLure, 1997, 29-30). In contrast, teachers in “effective” schools use “active learning” that emphasizes “the use of manipulatives and objects around which activities are built, problem-solving, and meaningful applications” (Levin 1992, 244). Drawing from children’s lives and experiences, progressive teachers are supposed to act as a guide to, rather than an autocratic dispenser of, increasing levels of knowledge that students will use to benefit their community. This pedagogy is believed to lead to student-centered learning—solving problems, building things—rather than “passive” learning—listening to lectures, repeating after the teacher, copying words or letters.

In education schools across the United States, contemporary versions of progressive education are enthusiastically taught in courses on “multiple intelligences” (Gardner 1993), cooperative learning, and differentiated instruction. But these methods are the subject of fierce debates—some argue that progressive education is insufficiently radical, while others long for the good old days of traditional education. According to Roberts, progressive education’s focus on problem-solving promotes a positivist outlook that accepts received definitions of problems and fails “to relate classroom knowledge to wider political issues” (2000, 55-56). A more liberatory education is offered by Freire’s “problem-posing” pedagogy in which oppressed people define their own problems and work collectively toward solutions (1997). On the other hand, conservatives call for a return to traditional methods, asserting that progressive education and its focus on group learning has “dumbed down” American children (Nykes 1995; see also Ravitch 2000). Others suggest that all U.S. citizens need to become “culturally literate” by studying the classics in history, literature, and philosophy, as is often done in private schools (Hirsch 1988; Shorris 1997-98).

Missionaries in the 1920’s, and the United States government and World Bank today, have latched onto progressive education as crucial to educational reform in Africa. Their versions of progressive education, I contend, are well suited to disciplinary power strategies. According to Foucault, disciplinary power is exercised by teachers, psychologists, and other “experts” as they enforce social norms through research in their disciplines and examinations of “subjects” (1995; 1980). The social and medical sciences therefore proscribe a range within which people can think and act—those outside the range are labeled as deviant or pathological. For example, World Bank policy makers characterize Africans as irrational and inefficient, recommending that they be trained in economics in order to ensure that loans are repaid (World Bank 1988, 68). Discipline also represents the techniques of power that are used to impose self-control. When past missionaries advocated that children “learn to do by doing” (African Education Commission 1920, 68), they hoped that progressive methods would distract young Africans from immoral temptations that, Europeans believed, reduced productivity.

Progressive education is also useful to educational reformers because its ideological buzzwords—learning by doing, problem solving, democratic teaching—appeal to a broad range of people. The argument that adopting modernity/democracy will eradicate tradition/autocracy dangles the promise of development before hopeful recipients and aid workers. Meanwhile, capitalists are appeased by progressive education’s practicality. By actively participating in learning, it is asserted, children learn the habits of informed citizens and productive workers who will help solve problems and create things. Activities are made “relevant” by linking them to real-world situations, such as producing news broadcasts or playing the stock market. These activities train students to be industrious and accept the established structures of society, not question them.

Upon reflection of Ghana’s history and my experiences as a volunteer, I realized that my advocacy of progressive methods reproduced the ongoing project to discipline Africans. Ghanaian classrooms certainly look traditional with their rows of desks, physical punishment, and teachers directing lessons from the front of the classroom. But after spending time observing lessons and talking with teachers, I found the usual depictions of African education too facile and judgmental. I began asking: How and what do teachers teach? Why do teachers teach the ways they do? Why are African forms of teaching being defined as a problem? I found that historical and present-day uses and meanings of discipline help answer these questions.

Outline of the Book

Like global aid-givers, Ghana’s leaders, preachers, and educators teach that African countries have failed to develop because of their ethnic unrest, corruption, and other forms of indiscipline. Villages are glaring reminders of that failure, and their inhabitants become special targets for reform. In this “economy of
power,” teachers became “teacher-judges” (Foucault 1995, 304) enforcing the behaviors and attitudes they believe are necessary for development. In Chapter One, I describe how teachers are trained for this work. The rigors of their training are captured in the motto of Peki Training College and title of the chapter, “Nihil Sine Labore” (nothing without work). Though the students used the discourses of democracy and progressive education to critique their schooling and society, their teaching tended to reproduce the anti-democratic practices that troubled them. Democratic pedagogies or an egalitarian campus, it seemed, might deter the country from the path of disciplined development.

In Chapter Two, “Moonlight Orgies and Other Forms of Sensuous Excesses,” I examine the discourses of colonists and missionaries who disparaged African values and practices as impeding civilization. While Europeans used force to control African spaces and minds, they also involved “local authorities” in implementing new social norms while maintaining acceptable modern traditions. Negotiations between and among Africans and Europeans indicate that it was not always clear whose ways would prevail, thus complicating the simplistic story of oppression that teachers want to tell. A mutual respect for hierarchies by black and white elites, combined with the coercions of British rule, led to the ascendance of Western and African institutions and values that stress submission to authorities.

In Chapter Three, “A Heavily Indebted Poor Country,” I analyze the images of Africans (such as that evoked in the chapter’s title) and visions of development presented by the World Bank, USAID, and IFESH. Secularizing the religious and moral imperatives of past missionaries, aid-givers ask individuals to work hard and rely on themselves, not governments or donors, by paying school fees or the full costs of utilities. These reforms will help people become “more cost-conscious when spending their own funds than when making use of a ‘free’ public service” (World Bank 1988, 61). To ensure that educational reforms are adopted, teachers are urged to “own” and “internalize” externally created policies. In fact, teachers were willing to adopt those projects that could be redirected toward their own goals of de-colonization and national growth.

I illustrate how teachers prepare children for citizenship and nationality in Chapter Four, “Friendly Africans, Deceptive White Men.” Children learn in social studies textbooks that they should work hard, be honest, and maintain ethnic harmony in order to preserve national self-determination. Otherwise, “The countries from which our country borrows money” will continue to “tell us how we must use the loans” (Baku, Ballans, and Omudic 1991a, 59). Teachers subvert old stereotypes to re-cast Africans as morally superior to white men whose exploitation caused Ghana’s underdevelopment. At the same time, westerners provide the models of development that will enable Ghanaians to finally liberate themselves from the influence of rich and powerful countries.

These chapters explore the “well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict” that determine what lessons and ideas are permitted, and what are prevented, in Ghanaian schools (Foucault 1972, 227). In the conclusion, “A Model to All of Africa,” I make predictions about the possibilities and problems of teachers’ work as ambivalent partners in the global development project. In building national pride, educators challenge the racism of whites, but tend to affirm rule by their own elites. In imagining their future, they seek self-determination, but by working within the global economic system. Nevertheless, by continuing to emphasize the collective strengths in their cultures, Ghanaians might be able to mitigate the injustices and inequalities that persist in many richer countries.

A Note on Research Methods

Much of the research for this book was gathered during a seminar I held at Peki Training College called “Democracy in the Classroom.” Through discussions with a group of trainees outside of their regular classes, I wanted to find out how they understood and taught social studies, and then assist them in improving their teaching. I drew from Greenwood and Levin’s “pragmatic” approach to action research that equates democracy with “the creation of arenas for lively debate and for decision making that respects and enhances the diversity of groups,” since diversity is the “most valuable source of potential positive changes in groups” (1998, 11). In developing the seminar topics, I hoped to encourage a variety of perspectives and provide both support and critique as we grappled with issues relevant to teachers’ lives and work. Rejoice, a student I met while supervising teachers in Dedeco village, graciously offered to help recruit participants. I set no requirements for joining the group other than willingness to attend regularly. The four women and ten men who chose to participate reflected the gender composition on campus and all but two were third-year students. All the students were Ewe (pronounced “E” as in set, “Vay”), the largest ethnic group in the Volta Region, and between twenty and twenty-six years old. Since the seminar was voluntary and held during students’ limited free time, I was very nervous that the trainees would drop out. Fortunately, all but one student out of the original fifteen stayed with the group and the participants asked to continue after (what I had planned to be) our last meeting. I was very happy to do so and invited them to provide the topics for discussion (Agenda for Third Term in Illustration #1).

We began meeting in February 2001 once a week for one and a half to two hours after classes had ended for the day. I structured our discussions around questions I hoped would lead to rich debate, such as: What is democracy? How do we practice democracy in the classroom? (See Illustration #1). I usually started the seminar with a question to generate responses, interjecting with comments or questions to move the discussion along, and giving my opinion only after discussion had taken place and when students asked for it. Our conversations often went down paths I had never intended or predicted, and trainees argued with each other as well as with me. While some were more outspoken than others, our meetings led to very animated discussions. In written reflections I had asked them to write about the meetings (Illustration #2), six of the participants praised the diversity of opinions that arose. According to one, Robert,
“This really made us to be tolerance [sic], listen to each other’s view and also allowed freedom of speech by each member.”

Officials at IFESH allowed volunteers to do research as long as it did not conflict with our regular duties. I told colleagues, students, and the staff at Peki about my project and obtained written permission from the principal for the study (Illustration #3). In addition to transcribing the tape-recorded seminar meetings, I took notes on discussions and activities in my classes, observations of teachers, staff meetings, and other experiences. I also gathered information from newspapers, textbooks, policy documents, and student work. Quotations that are not cited are from my notebooks or student papers in my possession. When attributing quotes, I provide the names of seminar participants who signed consent forms but use pseudonyms for everyone else. I use sic only for written sources, inserting explanatory text for oral statements while trying to preserve people’s unique ways of speaking English.

For the sake of readability, I use the terms educators or teachers when noting ideas I found common among teachers, tutors, administrators, and policymakers. While most of these educators were in the region where I worked, I believe my findings apply to other parts of Ghana. Certain themes I noticed at Peki also appeared in national newspapers, television broadcasts, and public speeches, as well as in works by scholars covering different parts of the country. In addition, trainees, tutors, and teachers told histories and expressed sentiments similar to those I found in social studies textbooks that are distributed nationally. This concurrence hinted at a broad consensus among educators about the meanings of Ghanaian nationalism and discipline, embodied for teachers in the structures, routines, and discourses of their training, the topic to which we now turn.

Notes

1. The Daily Graphic was state-controlled and funded until 1992. It is currently managed by an independent board but continues to be viewed as an “organ of the state.” Unlike reporters for private papers, Graphic reporters are invited to government functions and provided with refreshments and small gifts or “soli” (solidarity) to help ensure favorable coverage (Hasty 2002).
2. The Ewe are the predominant ethnic group of the Volta Region where I worked. The Anlo-Ewe live in the southern part and are famous (or among some Ghanaians, infamous) for practicing vodun, a traditional religion (Rosenthal 1998).
3. For the problems of global corporations’ reliance on cheap components made throughout the world, the most recent strategy for maintaining high profits, see Lynn 2002.
4. The banking method of education occurs when teachers simply “deposit” information into the minds of students. According to Freire, this form of education perpetuates inaction by the oppressed (1997).
5. TFA volunteers included Africans and Caribbean-Americans who were living in the United States. Presumably, their exposure to the west was sufficient to modernize their pedagogies.
6. The situation is different in a “substantial number of elementary school classrooms” that include student-centered learning (Cuban 1993, 272).
7. According to Bourdieu and Passeron, an education in cultural literacy would probably be insufficient to change people’s class position, since elite French students have acquired “almost by osmosis” aptitudes and skills that enable them to succeed in schools and careers (1979, 20-22).
Illustration #1: RESEARCH SEMINAR DISCUSSION TOPICS

Agenda for Second Term 2001

Meeting #1, January 30: Introduction and Archaeologist Activity.

Meeting #2, February 8: What are the social studies? Why do we teach them? What is nationalism? Is it important for teachers to teach children to be patriotic? Why?

Meeting #3, February 15: What is democracy? Is Ghana a democratic country?

Meeting #4, February 22: Textbook analysis: How has Africa been affected by religion? How should history be remembered?

Meeting #5, February 28: How do we practice democracy in the classroom? Would "democratic" teaching methods and curricula strengthen democracy in Ghana? Can democratic methods and curricula work in Ghana’s schools? Should we teach them? If so, how?

**Observe student teachers’ lessons during week of Feb. 26 to March 8.

Meeting #6, March 15: Evaluate your lessons: How did they work? How could they be improved? Does what happened constitute “democratic” practices? Why/why not?

Meeting #7, March 30: What have you learned? Have your views and practices on teaching and learning changed? In what ways?

Agenda for Third Term 2001

Meeting #1, May 10: What is racism? Why did it arise? Is it a unique creation of the West?

Meeting #2, May 17: Teaching and Learning Materials: What are some different ways to teach English in the primary schools?

Meeting #3, May 24: Guest Speaker, P.K. Agbodza: How do we write free-form poetry?

Meeting #4, May 31: What is the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH)? How does the Teachers for Africa Programme work? How can it be made more effective?

Illustration #2: INSTRUCTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON SEMINAR

SEMINAR REFLECTION

Please write your thoughts on the discussions we held this term. You are not limited to writing about the topics below; you do not need to write about everything listed either. Feel free to include any additional information you would like to tell me.

1. What were you expecting to happen or to get out of participating in this group? How was what happened different from or similar to what you expected?

2. Comment on the ideas you took from our discussions or would like to add to our discussion of any or all these topics:
   - Interpretation of objects/information and testing evidence (“archaeologist activity”).
   - Social studies and nationalism.
   - Religion and cultural change.
   - Textbooks and how they present information.
   - Democracy and how you define it.
   - Democracy in the classroom.

3. In what ways have your views on teaching and learning changed, if at all? Did the activities, discussions, or observation make you re-consider your own practices as a teacher?

4. Please mention any ways the group could be improved or changed for the next term.
Chapter One

Nihil Sine Labore

According to a research seminar participant, John, teachers began using the “activity method of teaching” since educational reforms were passed in 1987. In contrast to the past, teachers now “allow the children to express their view about the topic he [the teacher] is coming to teach. . . . Those days teachers were dictators but now we are practicing democracy.” At training colleges, trainees learn about progressive techniques and the values of cooperative learning. These pedagogies are presented as more democratic and, by some tutors, more African, than traditional techniques. In fact, the trainees used the discourses of progressive education and democracy to critique their schooling and society as too authoritarian. But I found that teachers asked questions to gather facts or affirm the “right” answers, not learn children’s “views.” They also avoided group work and other progressive methods. This does not mean that teachers in Ghana are incompetent or unmotivated. Rather, the contradiction between teachers’ critical words and compliant actions seems to suggest that the reparation of Ghana’s tattered international image is more pressing than democratic reform. The need for social order prevented teachers from using questions or methods that could lead to “rowdiness” or aberrant thinking. Steady, demanding industry on campus and in classrooms, enshrined in the college motto of nihil sine labore (nothing without work), prepares trainees at Peki for their unique roles as moral disciplinarians of schoolchildren.

Training and Schooling in Ghana

Peki Training College, also called Govco,¹ is located in a lush, shady campus across the road from a series of villages that constitute the Peki Traditional Area, about two hours northeast of Accra. At the college’s fiftieth anniversary celebration in November 2004, the principal dedicated an imposing golden gate that was recently built at the entrance—his wife jokingly referred to it as the “gates of heaven.” Attached to the entryway is a fence that will eventually circle the entire campus. It is intended to deter intruders as well as keep students from sneaking off campus. The classrooms and playing fields of the upper primary and junior secondary school (grades four through eight) are located on the left hand side of the road just inside the gate. Most training colleges operate demonstration schools that are open to the children of faculty and community mem-
bers. Further along the driveway, one-story administration, library, and classroom buildings are clustered around a courtyard. Beyond these buildings are student dorms and the dining/assembly hall. Faculty, administrators, and staff members live in subsidized houses along a road that circles through the campus. I was given a house near the principal’s house to better ensure my “security.” Most of the tutors kept gardens where they grew yams, cassava, maize, and other vegetables and raised chickens and goats. They also harvested palm wine and fruits from the trees on campus.

While Ewe comprised the majority of students at Peki, about fifteen percent were Akans, speakers of Twi languages. A larger Ewe identity was formed during colonial times when missionaries began standardizing the region’s diverse dialects and stories of origin, a process that was undertaken among Ghana’s other ethnic groups. Later, nationalists drew upon these re-constructed identities to argue for independence for “Eweland” (Greene 2002, 19-23). In textbooks and schools, educators replicate Ghana’s “fictive ethnicities” (Balibar 1996, 140) as integral components of the state, but the task of national and regional unification requires constant tending. As in other ethnic groups, Ewe speak different dialects and disagree among themselves. For example, in Fall 2004, people from the town of Tsito-Awudome destroyed an electric pole in Peki in retaliation for the killing of several Tsito men. Southern Ewes are often reprieved by Ewes at Peki for their adherence to vodun (Geurts 2002, 122; Tsadiey 2003, 4a). But Ewes unite around other issues, as when they gave overwhelming support to the party of ex-president Jerry Rawlings (his mother is Ewe) in recent presidential elections. They also nurse a sensitivity about the backwardness of their region. The Ashanti Region is viewed as having more power and wealth due to its gold mining and cocoa farming. In 2004, several friends complained about the closeness of Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the paramount chief of the Asante people, to President Kufuor. They resented that their own chief was ignored when foreign dignitaries visited and were upset that the chief had acted like a head of state by negotiating a grant from the World Bank. This was also controversial because, for historical reasons (see page 72), chiefs have been excluded from national government under the current constitution and cannot take part in “active party politics; and any chief wishing to do so . . . shall abdicate his stool or skin [symbols of power]” (Republic of Ghana 1992, 168).

Students often attend teacher training college because their grades are not high enough to attend university. Their three years of training are tuition-free, and they receive monthly stipends to cover exam fees and living costs. Students can choose to be sponsored by a district that will assign them to a school once they have graduated. If they do not approach a district, they will be posted by the Ghana Education Service to any vacancy in the country. The newest teachers are usually sent to the remotest areas—villages that are far from main roads or towns. The deprivations of life in remote areas caused concern among the trainees. When I asked my students their fears about teaching, one jokingly answered, “mosquitoes,” referring to the higher likelihood of contracting malaria and other diseases in outlying villages. In 2004, I found that only one of my former seminar participants, Raymond, had enjoyed his tenure in a “less endowed” village in the Northern Region as he felt he had a greater impact on children there. The need to travel and stay connected with one’s home village contributed to the undesirability of teaching in rural areas—these areas might not be well-served by public vehicles or one might have to take several cars to reach main roads. As others have noted (Geurts 2002, 31-32; Rosenthal 1998, 27), Ghanaian are constantly on the move—they travel to their home villages or larger towns to take care of business, shop, go to hospital, attend funerals or festivals, and visit relatives. This travel was facilitated by the cheap and often shabby mini-vans or buses known as tro-tros that constitute the primary traffic on Ghana’s roads.

In 2004, three of the fourteen seminar participants had wrangled transfers to teach in less isolated locations and five, including Raymond, were attending university. After three years of service, teachers can attend college and still draw their teaching salary. If a teacher works in a “deprived” area, they can apply to university after two years. Most teachers went to state universities in Accra, Cape Coast, Winneba, or Kumasi, but with the drive to privatization pushed by the World Bank, they could attend several new private, and costlier, universities that are helping fill the demand for education.

According to their code of professional conduct, teachers are entrusted with the “physical, mental, moral, religious, and spiritual up-bringing of the country’s children.” Therefore, they are placed “in a special position of responsibility which requires exceptionally high standards of behaviour and conduct” (Ghana National Association of Teachers 2000, 63-64). If teachers do not teach citizens to “live an honourable life, and perform honestly his duties,” according to a textbook for trainees, there are dire consequences: “Society will be full of rogues, thieves, smugglers, hoarders, and profiteers” (Fianu n.d., 12). Public condemnation helped keep teachers from straying from their proper roles. In one typical article in the Daily Graphic, a speaker at a local school awards ceremony blamed poor performance in the Volta Region’s schools on teachers who “engage in other activities such as extravagance on alcoholic drinks at the expense of their own welfare and to the detriment of classroom teaching” (Dzamboe, 2001, 13). Others did not seem to be held to such strict moral codes. When I met with a regional educational official who was also a chief, he was surprised that former President Bill Clinton was attacked for his affair with Monica Lewinsky, mentioning that chiefs in Ghana could do such things and it was nobody’s business.

In addition to the “example of teachers,” good citizenship is “learnt through . . . sports, history lessons, clubs or societies, prefects, monitoring systems, school worship, and religious training” (Fianu n.d., 12). In all government-funded schools, children attend mandatory religious services once a week and study Religious and Moral Education. Other required courses include Agricultural Science and Pre-vocational Skills, Ghanaian languages, English, Mathematics, Environmental and Social Studies, Physical Education, Music and Dance, and French as an elective. The themes and content of these courses are
centered on Ghana and West Africa—children do not learn about world history until secondary school. Since secondary school fees are higher and usually require boarding, only about half of the children who attend primary school continue on to secondary school. Between 1998 and 2002, thirty-four percent of females and forty-one percent of males attended secondary school, while seventy-eight percent of girls and eighty-five percent of boys were sent to primary school (United Nations Children's Fund 2005). Children are instructed in their local languages until grade three, then English becomes the language of instruction in all subsequent levels of schooling. However, at Peki Training College, the principal insisted that demonstration schoolteachers begin teaching in English in kindergarten. This policy probably accounted for their high scores on national exams that are written in English, but was fiercely opposed by some faculty members.3

Since the first schools were opened by missionaries, Christian or Islamic schools can be still found in most communities. Some areas rejected missionaries and established their own institutions, known today as Local Authority (L.A.) schools. In all schools, parents are charged fees that are used to build and maintain the campus. Schools also receive funds from the government to cover teacher salaries. To qualify for government assistance, religious schools must teach the national syllabus and enroll any student, regardless of religious orientation. Schools are usually one-story buildings made out of concrete blocks with metal roofs. In poorer communities, they are built out of sticks and roofed with grass. Since both of Ghana’s seasons—rainy and dry—are very hot, schools are open to the air and surrounded by gardens as well as cleared grounds for assemblies and recess. All the classes I visited had blackboards, chairs or benches, and desks, and some also had ceiling fans and lights. Teachers on break sat at tables under a shady tree—one trainee joked that teachers did not have a common room they had a “common tree.” As one finds in most public spaces, local women set up stalls so that students and teachers can buy groundnuts, oranges, bags of water, and stews for snacks or lunch.

The commands of teachers, daily routines, and spatial arrangements at schools help establish clear lines of authority and the requirements of good citizenship. In classrooms, children sit in rows facing a teacher, who sits or stands at the front directing lessons and monitoring behavior. As in their homes, the youngest or strongest children respect and serve those who are older or less able. Before classes start, students must clean school grounds, sweep classrooms, and fetch supplies for administrators and teachers. After morning chores, teachers and students, standing in rows by grade, gather to hear announcements and sing the national anthem, “God Bless our Homeland, Ghana.” Students then march to class in orderly rows. During the morning assembly, the principal or a designated teacher stand in front holding a switch to be used for punishments. For example, the principal of the demonstration school caned pupils who did not bring their school fees or who forgot their cutlasses and brooms for groundkeeping. At another school, the teacher on duty caned the children who arrived late for school, checking to make sure they were not wearing extra clothing to soften the blows.

The Ghana Education Service has recently come out against caning and some people were also opposed to the practice. In a written reflection about democratic teaching, one of the trainees, Koffie, worried that “the slightest mistake the pupils make, some teachers use that as an excuse to whip pupils mercilessly, which speaks ill about democracy in the classroom.” A public service announcement on Ghanaian television featured a dazed girl with a bowed head whose shyness and fearfulness was attributed to mistreatment by her parents. The announcer exhorted parents to “speak in a friendly way to your child” rather than hit them when they misbehave. However, most teachers feel caning is vital for discipline. My teacher friend, Mary, argued that some children simply do not respond to talking—after she switched students who had done poorly on a spelling test in her class, the children’s grades improved dramatically. A newspaper article reported that leaders and community members at Ekumfi-Attakwa called for “the re-introduction of corporal punishment to help curb pupil indiscipline.” This measure was recommended after a junior secondary pupil attacked a teacher (Daily Graphic 2004, 11).

Discipline was also reinforced in school uniforms. Rawlings standardized the uniforms when he was president—girls wear yellow shirts with brown jumpers and boys wear yellow shirts with brown shorts.4 On holidays or days when religious services are held, children wear blue and white. Recently, some mission schools decided to revert to the colors of “their old traditional uniforms.” This decision was believed to “help in the easy identification of pupils and students and control their movements both inside and outside their school.” Moreover, according to the Methodist Bishop who spoke about the change, “being clad in such colours would psychologically create an awareness for them [students] to behave responsibly both inside and outside the school” (Frimpong 2004, 26). This link between physical presentation and morality helped explain the rigors of student life at Peki Training College: academic study as well as hard work and strict rules were necessary to turn trainees into disciplined teachers.

Cooperation and Control

At her first meeting of Introduction to Education, a tutor invited me to sit with her on the podium in the dining hall while she taught the entire first year class of about 120 students. She asked students to list the benefits and drawbacks of “class teaching”—teaching to the whole group—and “group teaching”—cooperative learning. While the tutor acknowledged that class teaching is the more common method and considered more “efficient,” she and the students were aware of the arguments for and against cooperative learning and used the discourse of progressive education to make their cases. The trainees said that class teaching “makes students passive learners” and makes it “hard to know and cater to individual needs and talents.” The tutor concurred with the last statement by
mentioning how children give the choral response of “yes” when asked “Is it clear?”—even when some are still confused. The trainees cited “more active learning,” “learn cooperation,” and “encourages democracy” as the advantages of group learning. This last response evoked loud murmuring among the students who believed that this answer was meant to appeal to me, a representative of the United States and its citizens’ preoccupations with democracy.

In his lesson, the music and dance tutor encouraged students to “be innovative and interesting” in their lessons by using music to teach all subjects. Acknowledging that “the performing arts play a vital role in the lives of people of all cultures,” the tutor argued that the “life cycle of the African—cradle to grave—is filled with music.” While the white person listens then claps to music, “we move as soon as music begins.” He used his lesson to emphasize the need for de-colonization by exhorting students to teach music “in our own African singing, dancing, drumming—make lyrics African—why go to London [referring to the song “London Bridges”]?”

Drawing on the collective implications of progressive education, an English tutor presented it as more “natural” to Africans. During his lesson, the tutor warned third-year students to “always prepare well, be in the right mood, if your lessons are not interesting, if you are not playful, the students will not learn. When teaching English, always begin with a story.” The tutor subverted the usual conceptions of tradition and modernity by presenting cooperative methods as more African than individualistic methods used for “miseducation” by Christian and Muslim missionaries. Conceived this way, group work was a rejection of colonialism and could lead to national development: “In all your language lessons, have them do group work. In Ghana we have been miseducated because we grow up in a society where we can only succeed as a nation, as a society, as a community, as a group, by teamwork.”

Progressive methodologies were reinforced in textbooks and exams. A textbook on teaching environmental and social studies discussed different teaching strategies and the advantages and disadvantages of each: the inquiry approach, role playing, dramatization, debate, local study, and so on (Nyame-Kwarteng, 1999). In his textbook for teachers, Tsadiey recommended language games and giving mock news broadcasts along with drills and substitution tables as ways to teach English (1997). On an end of term exam, Peki College students were asked to, “Describe how each of the following methods of teaching can be used effectively (select topics of your own choice to illustrate your answers) at the Primary school: (i) Activity; (ii) Role Play (iii); Discovery.” For their final projects in 2001, all seniors were required to make a teaching and learning material (TLM). These items were believed to promote democratic teaching (see page 62).

But while tutors taught about progressive education, they did not really use these methods in their classes. The English tutor mentioned above was one of the few who used cooperative learning or teaching and learning materials in his classroom. Most relied on lectures and some discussion. Moreover, in their assessments of trainees, tutors looked for teacher discipline, not group work or student initiative. For example, at the end of a student’s sample lesson to his peers, an education tutor entered my classroom. After studying the blackboard, he declared that the lesson must have been good because the writing on the board was well organized. Good teaching was therefore displayed by following proper directions and procedures. When writing lesson plans, trainees carefully drew tables using straight edges and labeled the appropriate sections—topic, objectives, core points, etc.—according to their tutors’ instructions. In one of my classes, I asked groups to list positive and negative qualities of teachers. One group wrote that good teachers should be “disciplined and helpful,” and the group assigned to list qualities of a poor teacher mentioned, “He is indisciple [sic].” In response to my question about what they meant by discipline, a trainee explained that it was when “teachers closely follow their lesson plans.” After I asked students in another class to create children’s books, several expressed alarm about this project and would not proceed without learning the correct steps for making a teaching and learning material. As I would learn, they were rarely asked in schools to create things using their imagination.

Teacher discipline was not only exhibited by following procedures, it also required good speech and social etiquette. I was invited to join four tutors—three men and one woman—for panel interviews of prospective students. The tutors gave me the task of filling in a form with each student’s exam scores and checking whether the application photo matched the applicant. The gravity of the interview was established by requiring students to knock on the door and wait to be told to enter and sit down—those who failed to follow the rules were instructed to go out and start over again. In their interrogation of the candidates, the panelists assessed students’ English language skills by asking them questions about education or general knowledge—“What are qualities of teachers you don’t like?” or “What is a prime number?” They also used these questions to establish the proper attitudes of trainees: a balance between respectful humility and articulate confidence. Students who spoke poorly or were shy were mocked or scolded—to one particularly frightened man, the tutors demanded, “Why are you trembling so?”

The male tutors seemed particularly interested in unsettling the attractive female applicants. After one complimented a woman about her hairdo, another tutor asked her, “Will education reduce your beauty?” Another female was asked to give an example of teachers who are indirect. In her unfortunate example about science and anatomy, the interviewers pressured her to use the word “penis” and then remarked that she was “too young.” After commenting on one young woman’s nail polish, a tutor asked her, “What is your opinion of beauty contests?” In their remarks to these women, the tutors implied that intelligence and beauty were incompatible. The men also turned them into objects of temptation, notifying the women that their attractiveness could be useful—a few of the tutors would later favor the prettier ones, calling them to run errands or cook, or taking them as mistresses. Some of the male students were also shamed, as when one was asked his view on the use of condoms. His answer, that they “prevent premature birth,” led to roars of laughter from the panel.
When I commented on the humiliation and ridicule I noticed in these encounters, my Ghanaian colleagues explained that the interviews were a test of character and prepared students to handle difficult situations—teasing by other students, tough assessments by supervisors, teaching in remote villages. Reining in female sexuality (or reserving it for themselves), demanding deference and proper social grace, and insisting on proper (English) speech, the tutors also enforced the "exceptionally high standards" (Ghana National Association of Teachers 2000, 64) required of teachers.

The importance of self-control, hard work, and obedience to elders was reasserted in a daily regimen that bore traces of industrial education, an education that required scholarly and physical work for aspiring black teachers in the post-Reconstruction southern United States (see page 49). After rising at 5:30 in the morning, trainees at Peki do "projects," manual labor such as sweeping or farming and are also expected to do this work in the afternoons and on weekends. Student proctors punished rule breakers by assigning them more hard labor. Their chores adhere to gender divisions—female students clean tutors’ houses while male students do yardwork. After morning projects, students attend religious services. They then follow a pre-determined schedule of classes from 7:10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every weekday. In the evening, they study for three hours during “preps” and retire when “lights off” is signaled by drums at 10:30. If they want to leave campus, students must obtain an egress (permission) from the Head Tutor and are limited to two off-campus visits per term.

Strict rules were also extended over the appearance of students. Trainees are prohibited from wearing flashy jewelry or having "fashionable haircuts (and other weird hair cuts) with names like ‘ponk’ seven up ‘sweat’ etc. [sic]" (Peki Training College, 2000, 18). Students wore their neatly pressed uniforms (dresses for women, pants and collared shirts for men) all day, except when doing projects. As with schoolchildren, their uniforms were believed to inspire respect and keep indiscriminate at bay. At the December 2004 closing ceremony, the principal encouraged students to wear their uniforms and ties, rather than loose jeans and tee shirts with "Chicago Bulls logos," during their trip home from college. His remarks were funny (“You are not Michael Jordan”), but they also served as a warning about the immoral seductions of western culture. Many educators were deeply disturbed by hip hop apparel and dancing they saw in movies and music videos. As one tutor noted, “We don’t see them [African Americans] as brothers because "their culture" is so different. Tutors and administrators labored to protect students from, and prepare them to resist, these lures and other temptations off campus. At an assembly for student teachers, the principal cautioned the students to maintain discipline during their five weeks of teaching practice in area villages. He told the female students not to be “selling anything” and the male students to keep their eyes and hands off village girls, explaining that the villagers “will beat you” if trainees made advances to girls who had “already been promised to someone else at birth.” His humor perpetuated stereotypes about the archaism of village life—and recalled the moralism of 1920’s educational reformers who listed “character to withstand the temptations of the community” as the most important of the “minimum requirements” of African teachers (African Education Commission 1920, 60).

The contradiction between tutors’ lessons on student-centered and progressive education and the institutional focus on submission and self-control led to some confusion. In a lesson about pie charts where a sample chart would help the children understand the concept, a student teacher told me that he did not make one because "it would distract the kids." At a presentation of his teaching and learning material to a group of tutors, another senior explained that his students were excited when they saw his “eclipse tree” that showed the positions of the planets. One tutor expressed concern about this, asking, “How can you control the rowdiness?” Yet, at another presentation, she encouraged student initiative, asking a senior who displayed a poster of a religious poem that he had written, “Why not let them [children] come out with their own poems?” Another tutor added, “You must be resourceful and think very fast; you can divert from the lesson plan. The theories might not work in the classroom” though he admitted that “you are not taught like that [at the training college], you must follow step one, step two, and so on.” This was the same tutor who had come into my classroom and praised a lesson he did not see because the board work was neat.

**Defining Democracy**

Since it appeared that tutors and teachers did not use progressive methodologies, I wanted to find out from the trainees in my research seminar how they defined democratic teaching. Their understandings helped explain the forms of democracy they allowed in their classrooms, as well as the freedoms they longed for in their academic and professional lives. At our third meeting, I asked the participants, “Would you describe this group [the research seminar] as a democracy or dictatorship?” The students argued that it was a democracy because they could freely express their views and “you [the seminar leader] don’t impose your views on us. Even sometimes if you have an opposite view you allow us to explain our views as a group before you bring out sometimes yours.” When I noted that I had developed the discussion topics without their input, which was anti-democratic, Destiny responded that even though I gave them the topics, “You don’t come and tell us that, this and this. You bring us the topic, we argue it out.”

These evaluations concurred with how the students conceived of democracy when discussing their teaching and that of others. Democracy in the classroom was manifested when children “come out with” concepts and information by using their own knowledge and experience to answer teacher’s questions. Destiny described one of his lessons in primary school as “democratic and activity centred in that pupils were involved in the lesson from the beginning to the end. This is because, pupils were asked, questions through which they came out with concept [sic].” Raymond characterized an activity I had them do in the seminar
as "the activity method of teaching that we [Ghanaian teachers] have now adopted. There is no need to present the whole thing to them [students]. We allow them to think about the thing and come out with what they think about the topic we are teaching." John was surprised at how much the children already knew in a lesson he taught: "I think my children don't know the thing [topic] so . . . I asked them and they say all that I have to say. I don't know what else to say so I had to think very fast to bring some [other] things out before I was able to finish this lesson. So the children are very good . . . they can even disgrace you [by knowing more than the teacher]."

Yet other participants were not so sure that democratic teaching was common. According to Daniel, some teachers will "shout you down" because they are only concerned with hearing the right answer,

even when the child is wrong or right the child should be allowed to express his
or her views. Because I believe we in Africa . . . are so much used to what has
been . . . written down we don’t believe that there are some other ways of doing
the thing . . . So sometimes maybe a child has an idea to bring in but once a
teacher knows that is essay written down he says it’s wrong.

By questioning the authority of written texts, Daniel challenged the persistent connection of "civilization" with systems of writing. He also hinted at problems with forms of questioning that require students to give certain answers. Vivian said there was not always democracy at Peki College either because some of the tutors did not encourage discussion and "became annoyed" when students began asking questions. But John implied that sometimes student questions were meant to challenge tutors, "At times the student wants to test the tutor to see whether he knows what he is saying . . . so that we laugh at him [if the tutor is wrong]."

In addition to teachers who discourage participation, some children may have an "emotional disturbance"—"from the house" or caused by cruel teachers—or a "language" problem that prevents them from speaking out in their classes. When I supervised teaching practice at Dedeco village, the student teachers complained that the children's poor English skills inhibited discussion. Destiny argued that younger students' lack of experience also limits their participation, "If you are teaching at the lower primary . . . it is not dictatorship. It is only that at that age he [child] doesn't have much to bring out because the views he or she is having are so small so that you [the teacher] have to bring out yours." Kumah agreed that some children may be too young to ask questions but blamed their intelligence levels: "Their mentality doesn’t reach that stage to think further than what the teacher has delivered to them . . . So it isn’t that the teacher dictates to them . . . Some understand very quickly and some they will never, ever understand even if you break everything down."

The trainees suggested that children could learn democracy by becoming involved in decision-making, though this was not common in schools. Destiny argued that students should be involved in choosing class leaders—rather than the teacher choosing them which seemed to be the usual practice—and might even help set class rules:

It should be the collective idea of the pupils. 'Who do you think should be the
best person to do this?' Then it will follow 'I think this man, I think that man.'
Then let’s put it to vote. Then through that indirectly you are making them democ-

Some of the trainees seemed to concur with McNeil that national curricula and
testing "deskill" them as professionals (1986). Raymond described how teachers' views were not considered when "planners" made policy: "Whenever the teacher proposes any idea out of what he or she is encountering in the class-
room, he or she is never heard [by national curriculum-writers] . . . After plan-
ning the thing [curriculum], you [should] send it to the teachers to discuss." Though democracy could be increased by involving teachers in formulating national policies or children in making class rules, there were limits to what could be done. According to Destiny, "Even though we are crying that it should be child-centered it is the teacher that directs. So we cannot just ... put the topic on the board and then ask the pupils to come out with the activities. It is you the teacher who directs as to how the activity should be done and through that they [students] will come out with the concept."

I told the trainees that some researchers claimed that African educational practices inhibited democracy and asked, "Does the way you teach hold back democracy?" Destiny felt that past experiences in the classroom might lead to voter apathy: "Maybe . . . the teacher manipulates that [elections for school pre-
fector] and somebody who shouldn't have been the leader was made the leader and how that happened . . . has impact on the child so that when he . . . goes to make election it will just send the mind back . . . so there is not need even voting." Raymond and John looked outside the classroom to challenge the hierar-
chy that structure Ghanaian life. John criticized student life explaining that, "In the classroom they [tutors] allow us to express our views small [but] outside [the classroom] there is no democracy . . . so we have a limit to democracy [at Peki Training College]." In other words, while some tutors allowed students to express their opinions, campus rules and the system of student government were undemocratic—one of the alleged problems of the Student Representative Council was that it passed policies contrary to the wishes of the majority of stu-
dents. Raymond concurred that the college's (and society's) systems of authority improd democracy: "When you are suppressed it means you can't come out. When you come out and make an error you are allowed to accept it because you made it . . . But here in our schools you are not allowed to come out, all the time you are being suppressed . . . even when you come out of college it is the same." This "suppression" prevented students from making their own decisions and taking responsibility for their mistakes: "Fine we know the administration is our parent. Most often, they see better than we do. But . . . I believe they could give
us a try. ‘This is what we [trainees] proposed ... no matter [if] there is going to be a mistake’ ... they should prepare [us] for that mistake.”

Edem also grappled with social barriers to democracy in a fascinating exposure of the contradictions between ideologies and practices. In the following commentary, he explains that although leaders encourage people to vote, their daily practices are authoritarian:

It is only when it comes to elections of our president and parliamentarians where everybody wants to exercise their franchise ... after this sometimes people heading various departments try to dictate the people who work under them. And you know we Ghanaians being so submissive ‘yes sub master me no spoil job’... the moment you begin to come out and air your views people begin ... trying to de-employ you especially if you want to criticize your manager or your director.

Relations between upper-class Ghanaians or foreigners and their drivers or servants appeared to be like what Edem describes. However, tutors were not afraid to respectfully challenge administrators and elders at staff meetings. The degree of submissiveness/authoritarianism seemed to be widest between those who were educated and those who were not—and pressure to defer to authorities, according to Edem, prevents many Ghanaians from speaking out against injustice.

On the other hand, Edem argued that other social institutions might facilitate democracy, noting that “maybe they [critics of African education] did not view the outside of the classroom before they come out with their view,” because “when the child goes back to the house after school ... the parents in the home try to organize all of them together and do things as a family. Or ... you realize that among friends they [children] try to emulate some qualities of democracy [as when playing games].” In another discussion, seminar participants described ways to determine a country’s level of democracy. I asked three groups to place five countries—the United States, Ghana, Togo, Cote d’Ivoire, and South Africa—on a continuum from most democratic to least. The students disagreed over whether Ghana or the United States was more democratic based on elections. At one point, Mawuse asked, “From what we’ve discussed so far I’ve realized that we are only talking about elections, elections, elections. So I want to know if democracy is only about elections?” John explained, “It doesn’t mean only elections, but you have the right to express yourself.” Edem named quality of life and discrimination as other variables, noting that, “In Ghana we have freedom of movement. Laura ... said if you are black in U.S. you can’t move [freely in some places]. I think any white in Ghana moves freely.” In these ways, the trainees questioned the distinctions that upheld the superiority of American democracy.

Despite their critiques of school and social hierarchies, the trainees for the most part submitted to them. Group work and other student-centered methods were never mentioned as ways to practice democracy in the classroom. When I asked the trainees why there was so little cooperative learning in their classes, they expressed concerns about discipline, noting that if students sit in groups “they will be playing” or “chatting.” Rows enabled teachers to move freely so that they could stop “someone [who] is doing something which is not compatible with the lesson.” Vivian’s conception of the classroom recalled Foucault’s panopticon (1995): “Standing up in front of the class you can see what they are doing. Especially those at the back who like disturbing and will not like to keep quiet. So if you stand you will see them and then correct them when they are doing wrong.” While these students might ask more questions as teachers, or bring children into some decision-making, other democratic moves, even those proclaimed to be African by their tutors, threatened to get children moving or talking in disciplined ways.

Traditional and Modern Classrooms

As taught in the training college, Ghanaian teachers followed a common format when presenting lessons. To start their lessons, teachers reviewed students’ “Relevant Previous Knowledge,” usually by asking the class a question. One of the favorite opening questions used in lessons about diet, nutrition, crops in Ghana, and related subjects was “What did you take [eat] this morning before coming to school?” The children answered, “coconut” (porridge), “rice,” “yam.” Teachers then introduced the content of the lesson by writing information on the board, displaying a teaching and learning material, or telling a story. To check understanding of this new material, they asked recall questions such as “What do you see in this picture?,” “How do you make a basket?,” or “Who brought these clothes to Ghana?” Next students heard a lecture on the topic, listened to a story or textbook passage, or practiced skills by following certain steps as directed by the teacher—pronouncing words, reading texts, doing math problems, making baskets. This work was usually done by individuals sitting in rows. At the end of the lesson, teachers asked students to summarize the main facts learned in the lesson and list responses to questions such as “Name the two types of ducks in Ghana” or “How do you eat properly?” on the board. Alternatively, students might be directed to write answers in their notebooks. During the lesson, teachers made their standards clear by pointing out errors—“Write well. He is writing as if he is afraid of the chalk”—and highlighting exemplary responses—“I like the way she is calling [pronouncing] it.” Many teachers invited classmates to critique each other’s work. After a child wrote something on the board or answered a question, the teacher might ask the class, “Do you like what you see (or hear)?” or “Someone come and show him how it is done.”

Within the structured environments they created, teachers used humor, performance, and questions to engage children. I observed lessons taught by the seminar participants at their teaching practice and then we met as a group to evaluate the lessons. Their classrooms were rarely the dull and autocratic environments caricatured by aid-givers and scholars of African education. For example, Destiny taught the English concepts “on” and “under” by having first
graders state where an item was. He would place a piece of chalk on a desk and say, "Look at me very well, where is the piece of chalk?" The six girls and five boys in the classroom were eager to answer and had their hands up constantly. Frequently, the teacher admonished them to "keep quiet." But Destiny's playfulness also kept their attention—at one point, he even placed himself under a desk.

Vivian taught an environmental studies lesson on "foods eaten raw" in a second grade class at the Peki Training College demonstration school. The eighteen boys and nine girls sat in rows and were very excited to have a yew (Ewe word for white person) in the classroom. Vivian had to constantly warn the children to calm down: "Keep quiet, sit down, Selassie you are not the second teacher—are you also in teachers' college?" When she brought out a bag filled with fruits and vegetables, several of the children rushed from their seats to look at them. After asking, "What food did you take this morning? What did you eat on break?" Vivian began a discussion about whether vegetables like tomatoes could be eaten raw. Then the children played a game in which a child came to the front of the room, pulled fruits and vegetables out of the bag—"He has picked something I don't know the name of it... What is that?"—and stated whether or not the item should be cooked before eating. While many wanted to participate, there were others who never spoke or raised their hand—at one point, Vivian sent a child who had his head down to stand at the back of the room. The teacher ended the lesson by having the children sing an alphabet song with a religious theme—one of the lines was, "C is for Cain that killed his brother."

John taught a lesson on English composition in a fifth grade class of eight girls and twenty boys at Avetile Evangelical Presbyterian School. John's humor and the topic, "Your Mother," got the children involved. He started with a silly question, "How many of you don't have mothers or fathers?" and asked the children their mothers' names, places of birth, color ("Is she dark or fair?") and ages—the children laughed when someone answered "Fifteen." John joked that his mother liked "lizard meat" and asked students what foods their mothers liked to eat. He reinforced the importance of good behavior and honesty when he said his own mother likes "kids who are respectful and do their chores" and did not like children who are "insulting, stealing, lying, disturbing [misbehaving], talking." After this introduction, John posted a composition about mothers for students to copy. Earlier I had told the trainees that I felt that these essays stifled creativity because all children had to do was find the right words to put in the blanks in pre-written sentences. Rejoice mocked the technique by imagining how children might fill in the blanks: "His age is tall. The name of my father is Drake [a village]. He is 16 in complexion." But some of the trainees argued that children did not know enough English to write essays on their own.

Raymond taught an environmental studies lesson on "Ghana and her neighbors" to a primary six class of twelve boys and fourteen girls. He began the lesson by asking, "What is the name of your country?" The pupils laughed when someone answered Peki Avetile, the name of their village. In eliciting the names of Ghana's neighbors, Raymond encouraged participation by calling out, "Today is a special day for ladies and men—I want to see girl's hands up." "Oh Ellen it's a long time I heard from you," and "I want to hear from this side." He asked students to help others locate countries on the map posted on the chalkboard—"Somebody to help Aiku," "Who will be the ambulance or fire service to help him?"—and explained how to locate countries—"What must you do first to locate a country on the map?" "Look at the key—the blue indicates the sea." At the end, Raymond called on the class to list the ways Ghana and her neighbors interact. Then he asked, "All are using the CFA [Communaute Financiere Africaine—the currency of francophone countries in West Africa] except Ghana so what should Ghana do to improve upon her relations with her neighbors?"12

The seminar participants evaluated these lessons after each student teacher described them to the group. According to the trainees, Vivian's lesson on foods was democratic because "every child was asked and allowed to bring out his/her view" and the lesson was "child-centred and activity oriented since they were involved in activities through which the concept was developed by themselves [rather] than being spoon-fed." In their evaluation of Raymond's lesson, the trainees noted that it was democratic because students had located countries on a map and "came out" with their views. Consistent with the definitions they gave in seminar discussions, democratic lessons occurred when teachers asked questions of the children.

However, the teachers' questions elicited facts and information, not opinions or ideas or critical analysis. Part of this was related to children's facility with English. However, even in upper-level classes, open-ended discussions were avoided. Raymond came closest to opening a discussion about a potentially controversial issue. But by posing the issue of a common currency as the best way to promote friendly relations, he signaled to children that there was only one correct answer, squelching debate or analysis. Teachers also avoided activities that could distract students from the information or skills that they needed to learn that day. For example, students were not encouraged to work together even when doing art projects. In a pre-vocational skills class I observed, students worked individually at their desks making doormats, receiving help only from the grim student teacher who constantly warned "no talking" and "hurry up." A student teacher in another class asked students to draw pictures of "any plant" in their notebooks. While her students worked at their drawings, the teacher circled the room and told them to "draw it nicely" and "be quiet."

Teacher-centered activities serve the "institutional efficiencies" (McNeil 1986, 13) of schools by transmitting official knowledge required for national exams. Because "we do our learning for examination purposes," Ghanaians teachers faced pressure from school officials, parents, and students to cover the syllabus. Therefore they felt that they had to strictly adhere to their plans. A social studies teacher at the demonstration school warned his junior secondary students to "ask about real situations" when they grew curious about political matters that the teacher felt were unrelated to his lesson on the Mamprusi ethnic group. Even in the research seminar (that did not require an exam), students
grew concerned when they felt we were going off topic. In his written reflection about the seminar, Destiny suggested that to improve it, “after every discussion or before a new discussion, points noted down on the previous discussion should be read to us. This will help us know whether we are on course or deviating.” Johnson wrote that while he did not mind the debates we had in the seminar, “You should be able to regulate this atmosphere [when ‘there is too much arguments (sic)’] so that we can be able to cover the topics stated for the term.”

Teachers were therefore expected to lead students to correct answers and definitive conclusions about a topic—in the discussion about the levels of democracy in different countries, Mawuse suggested, “Let’s consider all the elements of democracy and let’s weigh it and see which is more democratic than the other.” Many teachers told me that they would never admit that they were wrong or did not know an answer to children. If teachers did not know an answer, they would ignore the question or scold the child for distracting the class. In a sixth grade math lesson I observed, a student teacher wrote on the chalk board that a negative number times a positive one yielded a positive number. The other student teacher in the room and I took him aside and told him that this was incorrect. The teacher quietly erased the chalkboard and moved on to the next problem, giving no acknowledgment that he had been wrong.13

By learning facts needed for exams, practicing good morality, and submitting to higher ranked peers and adults, children are encouraged to accept social values and hierarchies as natural and fixed. These lessons are reinforced in textbooks that explain to children, “Not everyone can be a leader. Communities need good community members too. Leaders need people who are willing to help and support them” (Quartey, Otu, and Forson 2000, 12). Thus, teachers’ methods and content helped build consent for Ghana’s political and moral leadership. In open-ended discussions, children might be tempted to question social expectations as the trainees did in the research seminar. Instead, like their proverbs and beloved stories about Ananse the spider,14 school lessons were didactic, not critical or philosophical. They aimed to teach good morality and proper citizenship—state versions of Ghana’s history and culture, the virtues of honesty, cooperation with neighbors—or practical and “modern” behaviors and skills—hygienic practices, the correct uses of food, scientific explanations for natural phenomena. Such lessons built nationalism, helped children distinguish between “truth and superstition” (Quartey, Otu, and Forson 2000, 35), and maintained a social cohesion that prevented any outbreaks of national indiscipline.

National Indiscipline

In their policy statements, U.S. and World Bank officials make clear their requirements for continued aid and loans: honest government, ethnic peace, “free and fair” elections. Drawing from modernization theory—and forgetting the United States’ own messy history of democracy—they envision an orderly progression to development, defined as “sustained economic growth” (USAID, 1991, 144), once a country holds elections. Modernization theorists argue that countries must follow certain steps to achieve development. Democratic institutions are important in this process. Competitive elections, an active civil society, social stability, and civil liberties can lay the groundwork for capitalist development, though a strong economy might also facilitate good governance and peace (see e.g., Lipset 1965; Huntington 1997). After President Bush met with four West African leaders including Ghana’s President Kufuor at the White House in 2001, the group issued a joint statement, published on the front page of the Daily Graphic, that reflects the modernization perspective: “Stability and peace are ends in themselves, but they are also essential pre-requisites for economic prosperity, development and poverty alleviation.” The statement included a warning to developing countries like Ghana that have experienced political and ethnic strife: “The United States opposes any action that undermines legitimate democratic rule, including coups and a direct grab, as well as constitutional change orchestrated solely to promote an incumbent’s hold on power or to impede an opponent” (Daily Graphic 2001, 1).

Some Ghanaians resented the threat underlying such statements and wondered about the true motives of outsiders. In the seminar, Destiny asked, “Why is the west so opposed to our development? They put conditions on the money they give us and end up thwarting our own plans for development.” But others castigated citizens for their lack of development. An education official at a cultural competition held at Peki College complained that too many Ghanaians “dodge” work and are “lazy” and declared that if Ghanaians are to “catch up” with the developed world, people had to change their “work culture.” In making suggestions for improving the Teachers for Africa program, Edem said that volunteers should be sent to teach in small villages, as this would increase children’s interest in attending school. Teachers would also be more conscientious: “So when you are sending an IFESH TFA to those villages [you will] make the children in those communities to have some kind of attitude towards education so that you will even realize that those of them who are not going to school will even change their attitude and start going to school . . . some teachers there who have not been performing their duties will learn from you too.” Destiny confirmed this, saying that “even your presence alone will make the pupils come to school . . . how you are going to teach them will motivate them to learn more.” Several trainees added that expatriates got Ghanaians to work harder than they do for government officials or Ghanaian entrepreneurs.

In a discussion about voting, the seminar participants explained that in the December 2000 elections, many people “just followed the crowd” in their choices or were given money to vote for certain candidates. After Daniel argued, “But once you went there [into the voting booth] to do that thing yourself you made that decision,” Raymond asked, “Do you have that decision? You followed the minds of the people. He’s not good, he’s a thief . . . It wasn’t willingly because people had that influence on you. But here [if] you are talking of democracy, it should come from you, what you think is right.” In the discussion about which of five countries was most democratic, two groups chose Ghana
because the 2000 presidential election had been "freer and fairer" than the United States' contested elections. But the pro-American group argued that a longer history of democracy and the fact that Democratic candidate Al Gore had conceded defeat indicated that the United States had the stronger democracy. They claimed that there would have been rioting in Ghana if the election had been as troubled as that in the United States, because "we [Africans] don't understand that word democracy." Kumah and Destiny responded that Ghanaians must understand—their elections had been peaceful, even during the run-off, and Jerry Rawlings had stepped down. Despite this convincing evidence, there was still a sense that "illiterates" were incapable of practicing democracy. I engaged in a discussion with an English tutor who argued that "Africans" were not yet ready for democracy because there was no tradition of it and they needed strong leaders to keep control. When I countered that tutors at Peki seemed to make decisions using democratic methods at staff meetings, he claimed that this may be true among "educated" people but "not in villages."

Such arguments arose from educators' fears that eruptions of national indiscipline destroy Ghana's reputation and scare off investors and tourists. An editor of Peki News, the local newspaper, blamed the Accra Stadium disaster of May 9, 2001, at which 126 people were killed while fleeing from tear gas, on "INDISCIPLINE. Yes NATIONAL INDISCIPLINE . . . I am included, you are included everybody included [sic]. Ghana is NATIONALLY INDISCIPLINED." The writer cites political corruption and gambling as well as other forms of national indiscipline that "officially aid andabet LAZINESS!" For this writer, indiscipline is a grave problem because "Ghana will no more command any cognizable respect in the local, national, continental or international arena." The author ends by pleading, "Can't we at least, for his [Kofi Annan, 'Prime Minister of the Whole World'] sake, behave decently to enable him to hold his head up, chest out wherever he goes?" (Peki News 2001, 2; capitals in original). By rioting or taking the illicit gifts of politicians, citizens confirmed to themselves and the outside world that Ghanaians were "failing" at democracy.

Chafing at the authority of their tutors and elders, and proposing ways to include teachers in policy-making, the students agreed that freedom of speech and participation in decision-making are important components of democracy. Their commitment to free speech seemed to be borne out in a lively civil society and press. But though the trainees felt that teaching had become more democratic because teachers allowed children to "come out" with information, teachers constrained pupil's responses by asking factual or yes/no questions and quickly suppressing questions that strayed from the topic. From speeches and news reports about the reasons for Ghana's failure to develop, the trainees understood that development required particular forms of national discipline—honest government, hard work, social and political stability—and enforced these in the conduct and content of their lessons. Their ascription of characteristics such as illiteracy, laziness, and corruptibility to village people, and subsequent efforts to turn them into productive citizens, served the global project to recruit cheap labor and bring capitalism to new markets. In other words, as moral disciplinarians, they helped carry out the work started by colonists and missionaries, discussed in the next chapter.

Notes

1. "Govo" is short for Government College. Peki was established by the government. Most teacher training colleges in Ghana were founded by missionaries, for example, the Seventh Day Adventists have a college at Koforidua known as "Sedco."

2. The Asantehene (title of leader of Asante) had been invited by the (now former) President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, to Washington, D.C., where he obtained a $30 million grant from the Promoting Partnership with Traditional Authorities Programme. The money was to be used for potable water projects in the Volta as well as Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions.

3. There is much debate about the politics of colonial languages in Africa. Ngugi wa Thiong'o believes that literature in such languages does not count as African but rather is a "hybrid tradition" of Afro-European (quoted in Lazarus 1994, 113). Brock-Utne argues that the continued use of these languages is imposed on Africans by textbook companies (2000). These forms of imperialism prevent African writers and translators from capitalizing on their own languages (Bokamba 2002). In Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah chose English as a neutral language to unify the diverse ethnic groups.

4. Uniforms also denoted solidarity—co-workers, club members, or peer groups made outfits out of the same cloth to wear to work on special occasions.

5. Story-telling in Ghana incorporates many of the methods that progressive educators would encourage, such as passing the story to have children guess what will happen next and having children explain lessons they learned after the story. The storyteller will also invite children to dance or sing a song at certain points in the story.

6. A joke submitted by a primary school pupil to the Peki Training College newsletter played on the perceived simplenessightedness of villagers: "One day a man who had stayed in a village a long time went to Accra. As soon as he reached Accra, he saw a drawing of a man and a woman pounding fufu [a national dish]. He shouted 'Hi people in Accra, you are great! You are on the wall and at the same time pounding fufu!" (2001, 6).

7. This link, long since problematized (see e.g., Feierman 1993; Vansina 1985), persists, most recently in the June 2004 New York State Global History Regents exam for high school students. In one question, students are asked to explain what a chart that includes "system of writing" refers to—the correct answer is "elements of a civilization."

8. Students of all ability levels tend to learn together in Ghana as tracking is rare. Some students at Aboaase (a nearby village) were unhappy with tracking at the junior high school, worrying that dividing students into group "A" (smart) and "B" (not as smart) hurt both groups.

9. John Dewey also feared the "studied lack of adult guidance" that took place in certain progressive classrooms (Crenin 1964, 234).

10. Besides eliciting enthusiastic responses, such questions helped re-assert children's identities as Ghanaians. As discussed in Chapter Four, eating their diverse foods was an important cultural activity that built national unity and pride.
Chapter One

11. Many Ghanaians at the training college were aware that gender was a concern of international aid workers. In our conversations, several of my male colleagues would mention “Beijing” referring to the 1990 United Nations Conference on Women, often to tease me. These men were quite pleased when I chose to serve them food at faculty parties along with the women tutors who had also cooked the food. As among the students, there were fewer women tutors (five) than men (eighteen).

12. Since then, the economic community of West Africa (ECOWAS) that includes Ghana decided to adopt a common currency, the Eco. The program was not yet implemented in 2004-2005.

13. When I visited Rejoice’s class in 2004, I saw a young girl come to the board and quietly point out an error Rejoice had made. Rejoice told me that, unlike other teachers, she encouraged students to notify her of her mistakes.

14. Ananse is a popular figure in children’s folktales. Ananse often gets into trouble and brings misfortune to his family and friends. As a junior secondary textbook explains, “In most folktales, ‘Ananse’s’ bad behavior was responsible for the many hardships—illness, drought, famine—that his community faced. When we behave like Ananse we are likely to suffer” (Bramah et al. 1993, 43).

15. In contrast, dependency theorists argue that since capitalism relies on the continued exploitation of others, it is difficult if not impossible for “peripheral” countries to rise out of their poverty (Frank 1967).

Chapter Two

Moonlight Orgies and Other Forms of Sensuous Excesses

Colonizers of Africa were keenly interested in maintaining peace and order so that they could earn enough profit to justify their presence to home governments and company stockholders. To create a favorable trading environment on the Gold Coast (the colonial name of Ghana), the British recruited local chiefs and native preachers, teachers, clerks, and soldiers to implement and enforce new laws, run bureaucracies, and help deliver the sermons and lessons that would quell Africans’ “moonlight orgies and other forms of sensuous excesses” (Lewis 1962, 83). Indirect rule, as this system was called, required the imposition of so-called modern behaviors and attitudes alongside the maintenance of certain traditions. This situation led to the formation of fluid social alliances during the colonial period as people wrangled over the meanings of “rightful custom” and modernity. At times, British officers joined with chiefs and elders to maintain certain African traditions while youths, Christians, or educated persons took advantage of changing circumstances to flout them. At other times, the British joined with Christian converts to force recalcitrant chiefs or communities to adopt new attitudes and practices. In other words, moral and intellectual systems connected with capitalism were imposed through force, but also through Africans ensnared in the structures of power. Ultimately, the “traditions” that remained, and new institutions and values adopted, would be those believed to best ensure discipline and development.

Indirect Rulers

Colonization by Europeans on the west coast of Africa was not inevitable. An African chief named Kwame Ansah tried to dissuade a Portuguese knight, Nzapamba, from building a fort on the coastline of present-day Ghana in 1642. “The passions that are common to all us men will therefore bring on disasters; and it is far preferable that both our nations should continue on the same footing as they have hitherto done, allowing your ships to come and go as usual” (quoted in Carnmichael 1993, 72-3). Building proceeded, however, after the Portuguese promised not to interfere with local rule. They were followed by other