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Spiritual Pawning: "Mad Slaves" and Mental Healing in Atlantic-Era West Africa

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Abstract

When enslaved people became "mad," they lost exchange value as labor capital on the Atlantic market, as neither African nor European merchants considered the mentally distressed to be valuable bondsmen. Historians of slavery in the Americas have drawn on accounts of "mad slaves" to understand how labor value was generated, and disrupted, through the transport and sale of captive Africans. But historians have yet to examine the relationship between psychological distress and enslavement in West Africa, where many of the captives in question originated. This article opens a research agenda on madness in Atlantic-era West Africa through a case study of the role of Ga shrines as spaces of mental healing in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gold Coast, today's coastal Ghana. Ga families confided their mentally distressed kin to shrine priests, who treated severe illnesses caused by ritual afflictions. When shrine priests healed these ailments, they engaged in spiritual pawning: converting mad persons, deemed unfit for sale due to mental incapacity, into potential subjects of enslavement. West African shrines were thus spaces of value conversion that reflected a broader monetary and ritual economy of capture, enslavement, and raiding that proliferated on the Gold Coast.

Keywords: asylum; fetish; Gold Coast; Ghana; Ga shrines; slavery; mental illness; mad slaves; *panyarring*; pawning

In 1709, a Fante trader at Anomabo on the Gold Coast of West Africa reportedly sold a "mad slave" to the British slave trader John Brethaver. Upon observing signs of madness, Brethaver brought the man back to Anomabo to seek reimbursement. Likely angered at the insinuation that they had bartered in bad faith, the Fante traders held Brethaver in custody until the Royal Africa Company paid a ransom for his release.[1]

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[1] Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 60. In this article, the "Atlantic era" refers to the Afro-European trading interface that developed on the West African coast from the late fifteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries.

Decades later, in 1732, Robert Durand, First Lieutenant of the slaving ship *Diligent*, testified at the admiralty court in Vannes, France that he had witnessed Captain Pierre Mary commit fraud with African captives in the Caribbean. One of the enslaved men branded and reserved for Captain Mary's payment had gone "mad." So, the captain exchanged this mentally distressed captive, and three other enslaved people bearing his mark, for healthy persons belonging to the ship's investors. The results of the lawsuit are lost, but the "mad slave" and the other captives were later sold at a loss as part of the ship's cargo at a warehouse at St. Pierre, Martinique.[2]

Over a century later, in 1851, William Smith signed a purchase agreement with Andrew Bunch in South Carolina to buy four enslaved people: Bob, Binah, and Binah's two children. Bob expressed displeasure with the sale, entered his home, and sliced his throat open. Bleeding profusely, Bob returned outside and died in front of Bunch, Smith, Binah, the children, and bystanders. Amidst the bloody scene, Bunch and Smith began arguing over who should bear the cost of Bob's death, seen as evidence of insanity. Smith argued he should not be liable for Bob's fee since the suicide had occurred after the purchase agreement but before Bob was delivered into his custody. John Belton O'Neall—the Chief Justice of South Carolina, himself a slaveowner, and noted scholar of slave law—eventually ruled against Smith. Since the contract was for a collective purchase for all four people, the buyer was liable for the cost of the suicide.[3]

Drawn from the work of historians of West Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and North America, these legal contests over the value of "mad slaves" reveal how managing the psychological state of African captives, alongside the sale of their bodies, was crucial to the objectification of Black life underpinning the system of holding, transferring, and selling enslaved persons across the Atlantic.[4] From the height of the transatlantic slave trade in the early eighteenth century, until the acceleration of colonization in Africa in the mid-nineteenth, European and African slave traders across the Atlantic world thought of mental illness as exclusionary criteria for purchasing captives in West Africa. If slaves became mad, they lacked exchange value as labor capital on the Atlantic market. In the Americas, selling a "mad slave" without fair notice was a profitless endeavor and considered fraud, akin to selling refuse.[5] Of course, what madness meant, and looked like, varied across different geographic and social contexts. But there was a widely recognized threshold of insanity in the Atlantic world. Selling a captive whose behavior crossed this threshold, or even accusing a person of doing so, was a grievance worthy of litigation in South Carolina, France, the Gold Coast, and Martinique alike.

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[2] Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

[3] Jenny Wahl, *The Bondsman's Burden: An Economic Analysis of the Common Law of Southern Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 42. On the court ruling, see J.S.G. Richardson, "*Reports of Cases at Law Argued and Determined in the Court of Appeals and Court of Errors of South Carolina*" (Charleston: Walker and Burke, 1851), vol. 4, 581–85.

[4] Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jennifer Lambe, *Madhouse: Psychiatry and Politics in Cuban History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Manuella Meyer, *Reasoning against Madness: Psychiatry and the State in Rio de Janeiro, 1830–1944* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2017).

[5] Lisa Lindsay, *Captives as Commodities: The Transatlantic Slave Trade* (London: Pearson, 2007), 179–80.

In slave markets from West Africa to the Americas, managing minds was central to the work of enslavement. The architecture of dungeons and the techniques of confining African captives at coastal slave castles was designed to break people down psychologically to a point where they would be pliable enough to be forcibly moved across the ocean.[6] Slavers also cultivated the disposability of Black life to incite psychological terror: they intentionally allowed a certain number of "refuse slaves" to perish in the Middle Passage and at auction blocks in the Americas from disease, starvation, or suicide.[7] But they toed a fine line—they had to keep most of their captives alive, physically fit, and psychologically sound enough so they would be purchased by buyers, who inspected slaves for signs of physical and mental illness.[8] "Mad slaves" were also politically potent. At times, slaveholders in the Americas interpreted madness as a form of revolt. Guinea Surgeons, doctors on British slave ships, knew the conditions in which Africans were held in the hulls of boats were so deplorable as to induce madness.[9] In particular, they feared "melancholia"—a diagnosis linked to the humoral theory that excessive black bile in the body caused depressive moods––could spread among enslaved Africans and cause revolts.[10] To avoid this risk, surgeons recommended allowing captives to drum and smoke tobacco on ships.

Because madness placed limits on the commodification of human beings, accounts of "mad slaves" have been productive foils for historians of slavery in the Americas to understand how labor value was generated through the transport and sale of captives across the Atlantic.[11] Slave-holding classes in the British Atlantic used the term "mad slave" to refer to enslaved Africans who experienced symptoms of mental distress not easily attributable to organic illnesses. Historians of the Atlantic have adopted this actor category as an analytical term, sometimes uncritically applying it to geographies and time periods far from its origins. In historical scholarship, the "mad slave" has thus become as a nodal point for analyzing evolving dynamics of disparate understandings of spirit, reason, sanity, therapy, violence, fetish, ritual, capture, morality, and socio-political belonging. Despite intense interest in the figure of the "mad slave," Atlantic-era historians have yet to examine the relationship between psychological distress and enslavement in West Africa, where many captives originated. Histories of mental health in Africa, which often begin in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries with the establishment of colonial asylums, also overlook "mad slaves."[12] For years, literature on slavery and

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[6]John Osei-Tutu, *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450–1960* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[7]Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[8]Sowande Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

[9]Richard Sheridan, "The Guinea Surgeons on the Middle Passage: The Provision of Medical Services in the British Slave Trade," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 14, 4 (1981): 601–25.

[10]Thomas Aubrey, *The Sea-Surgeon, or the Guinea Man's Vade Mecum* (London, 1729), 128–30, and esp. 132; Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), 23.

[11]Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Jennifer Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

[12]One partial exception is Katie Kilroy-Marac's brief comparison of the transfer of West African subjects from Senegal to the Saint Pierre Asylum in Marseilles, between the 1880s and 1920s, with the forced movement of Black bodies in the transatlantic slave trade of earlier centuries. A second is Kalle Kananoja,

questions of human labor value in Atlantic-era Africa has centered on debates over what Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff called "wealth-in-people": the notion that wealth was reckoned in kin, clients, and slaves—rather than land—in much of precolonial Africa. In many African contexts, rights over people were highly differentiated, which shaped institutions of slavery and other forms of servitude in the Atlantic era.[13] As Jane Guyer and Samuel-Martin Eno Belinga later argued, elites did not value all people equally or strictly for their labor. Rather, they recruited followers with specific skills.[14] While scholars continue to modify the "wealth-in-people" paradigm, we know little about how African societies valued persons whose labor and skills could not be readily harnessed, such as the mentally distressed.[15]

   This article opens a research agenda on madness and enslavement in West Africa. It does so through a study of the role of shrines as spaces of mental healing among Ga speakers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of what is today coastal Ghana, known in the Atlantic period as the Gold Coast. As the founders of Accra (1677–present), a major Atlantic port city for the exportation of gold and enslaved people, the Ga people have had a central role in the creation of an Atlantic interface in West Africa for the last four hundred years.[16] In the late nineteenth century, the Accra Asylum—the earliest European psychiatric hospital in the Gold Coast and the second oldest in West Africa—was built on their land.[17] But long before the opening of a European-run Asylum, Ga shrine priests treated the mentally distressed. Historians have analyzed Ga shrines as sites of resistance to European capital accumulation as they became spaces of political asylum for runaway slaves and financial asylum for debtors who took refuge in them.[18] By accumulating people on the run, shrines and

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who revisited Joseph Miller's discussion of *Banzo*, a mental illness that afflicted captives in Angola and Brazil. Katie Kilroy-Marac, *An Impossible Inheritance: Postcolonial Psychiatry and the Work of Memory in a West African Clinic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Kalle Kananoja, *Healing Knowledge in Atlantic Africa: Medical Encounters, 1500–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Joseph Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

   [13]Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

   [14]Jane Guyer and Samuel-Martin Belinga, "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa," *Journal of African History* 36, 1 (1995): 91–120.

   [15]Recent contributions to this debate in West African contexts include: Assan Sarr, *Islam, Power, and Dependency in the Gambia River Basin: The Politics of Land Control, 1790–1940* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2016); Sara Berry, "A Death in the Family: Property, Inheritance, and Belonging in Late Colonial Asante," *Journal of African History* 62, 2 (2021): 271–83; Emmanuel Akyeampong and David Owusu-Ansah, "Wealth in Knowledge: Spiritual Service and Political Power in Precolonial Asante," *Journal of West African History* 8, 1 (2022): 119–41.

   [16]James Anquandah, "The Accra Plains c. AD 1400–1800: Overview of Trade, Politics and Culture from the Perspective of Historical Archaeology," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 2006, sup. 7 (2006): 1–20; P. Ozanne, "Notes on the Early Historic Archaeology of Accra," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 6 (1962): 51–70; P. Ozanne, "Indigenes or Invaders?" *Antiquity* 37 (1963): 229–31; *idem*, "Notes on the Later Prehistory of Accra," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, 1 (1964): 3–23; Irene Odotei, "External Influences on Ga Society and Culture," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 7, 1 (1991): 61–71.

   [17]John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (London: James Currey, 2001).

   [18]Donna Maier, "Islam and the Idea of Asylum in Asante," in John Hunwick and Nancy Lawler, eds., *Cloth of Many-Colored Silks: Papers on History and Society Ghanaian and Islamic in Honor of Ivor Wilks* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 319–37; and "The Practice of Asylum at Religious Shrines in Asante

shrine priests diverted labor from European forts and slave ships.[19] Yet shrines not only resisted the logics of transatlantic capital, they also generated human labor value for the slave trade.[20] While we cannot always be certain of the intentions of shrine priests for clients after treatment, it is clear that mental healing converted uncommodifiable "mad slaves" into potentially salable beings.

I refer to the constellation of techniques used by Ga shrine priests to ritually heal and monetarily revalue mentally distressed persons as *spiritual pawning*. In Atlantic-era West Africa, pawning was the practice of giving one's kin over to a creditor as security until the repayment of a debt.[21] Pawns lived with the family of the creditor and labored for them. Their labor covered the cost of room and board and the interest on the debt but not the principal, which the debtor had to pay to reconstitute the pawn. Europeans and Africans used pawns to secure trade deals. For example, when retrieving slaves for transport from slave markets, Ga middlemen would often leave a family member as a pawn with European traders who financed their trips with gold. The pawn could be sold if the Ga traders failed to return with slaves by an allotted time.[22] Like debt bondage pawns, mentally distressed people were thought to owe debts, but socio-spiritual rather than monetary ones. Families placed the mentally distressed in the custody of a shrine priest, who propitiated spirits for healing and used their clients' labor during recovery. In the event of successful healing, families could recuperate their kin after an exit ritual and a thanksgiving fee. Ga shrine priests thus worked as psychotherapeutic creditors. Mental healing was a form of labor capital recuperation and conversion. By tracking spiritual pawning in Ga healing shrines, this article situates West African practices of mental healing in transatlantic processes of labor value creation. It also interrogates the relationship of social belonging to psychological therapy, the moral ambivalence of healing, and the politics of capture and sanctuary in West African shrines prior to colonialism.[23] In so doing, the article reconstructs how enslavement transformed Ga etiologies of madness and psychological therapies.

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and Its Periphery," in Toyin Falola, ed., *Ghana in Africa and the World: Essays in Honor of Adu Boahen* (Lawrenceville: Africa World Press, 2003): 227–48.

[19]William Pietz, "The Phonograph in Africa: International Phonocentrism from Stanley to Sarnoff," in Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young, eds., *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 263–85.

[20]J. Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

[21]Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

[22]Pernille Ipsen, Daughters of the Trade: Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriage on the Gold Coast (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[23]This inquiry builds upon the work of Nancy Hunt, A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reveries in Colonial Congo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Tom McCaskie, "Unspeakable Words, Unmasterable Feelings: Calamity and the Making of History in Asante," *Journal of African History* 59, 1 (2018): 3–20; Maier, "Islam and the Idea of Asylum," and "Practice of Asylum"; Jennifer Lofkrantz and Olatunji Ojo. "Slavery, Freedom, and Failed Ransom Negotiations in West Africa, 1730–1900," *Journal of African History* 53, 1 (2012): 25–44; Nathan Carpenter, "Ransom as Political Strategy: Captivity beyond Commercial Transaction on the Upper Guinea Coast in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of West African History* 4, 2 (2018): 1–18; Sarah Balakrishnan, "Of Debt and Bondage: From Slavery to Prisons in the Gold Coast, c. 1807–1957," *Journal of African History* 61, 1 (2020): 3–21.

Spiritual Capture in Accra of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

As demonstrated by historians and anthropologists of the region, West African societies used their engagements with old and new spirits, divinatory practices, and power objects as a means of negotiating topologies of violence and enslavement tied to the Atlantic slave trade.[24] In a similar vein, Atlantic-era Ga etiologies of mental distress—and healing shrines—were shaped by wide-ranging concerns over the spiritual repercussions of practices and economies of enslavement. By the eighteenth century, African people of the greater Gold Coast region understood signs of mental distress to have multiple potential causes. Overconsumption of alcohol and certain fevers were known to cause symptoms like delirium and mania. However, psychotic states that lacked physical explanations were understood to be caused by being hunted and caught (*mɔ*) by a spirit (*wɔn*).[25] Imagery of the spirit as hunter was not neutral in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when practices of capture, raiding, and enslavement were ubiquitous along the Gold Coast and in its hinterland. Rather, actions in the unseen spirit world that caused mental distress in Ga ritual frameworks reflected emergent repertoires of capture in the visible world, where anyone could potentially become vulnerable to seizure and sale.[26]

The Ga people of Accra played a central role in the creation of an Atlantic exchange interface in West Africa, which facilitated the translation of value across European and African traders for purchasing gold and people. The archeological record and oral traditions reckon the formation of the Ga state as a response to competition from neighboring ethnic polities, particularly the Akan states to the north, and as a response to the rise of Afro-European coastal trade.[27] This competition led to the founding of the first capital of the Ga Kingdom at Ayawaso Hill, known as "Great Accra" to European merchants by the sixteenth century. Due in part to new coastal trade opportunities with Europeans during the Atlantic age, Ga livelihoods began to shift from a reliance on agriculture, salt production, and fishing to one that was, by the 1600s, centered on the urban economic power of Great Accra,

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[24]Like several coastal African communities, the Ga propitiated the ocean as a spirited being and understood the ocean-bound traffic in people as witchcraft: soul eating cannibalism. Robin Law, "West Africa's Discovery of the Atlantic," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 44, 1 (2011): 1–25; Robert M. Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Of Small Things Remembered: Beads, Cowries, and Cultural Translations of the Atlantic Experience in Yorubaland," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, 2/3 (2002): 427–57; Rebecca Shumway, "The Fante Shrine of Nananom Mpow and the Atlantic Slave Trade in Southern Ghana," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 44, 1 (2011): 27–44; Andrew Apter, "History in the Dungeon: Atlantic Slavery and the Spirit of Capitalism in Cape Coast Castle, Ghana," *American Historical Review* 122, 1 (2017): 23–54.

[25]Johannes Rask, *A Brief and Truthful Description of a Journey to and from Guinea* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publications (2009[1754]), 57. Unless otherwise stated, African language words in this text are Ga (or Akan loan words commonly used by Ga speakers). I base translations on my own native fluency in Ga and the mid-nineteenth-century Ga dictionary by the Basel Missionary Society: Johann Zimmermann, *A Grammatical Sketch of the Akra-or Ga-language*, vol. 2 (Basel: Basel Missionary Society, 1858).

[26]By the eighteenth century, all Africans (including the Ga, who had worked to distinguish themselves as unsalable in earlier periods) were vulnerable to enslavement. See Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade.*

[27]John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death & Burial in Early Colonial Accra," in David M. Anderson and Richard Rathbone, eds., *Africa's Urban Past* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 205–21, 9.

a trading hub for merchants, craftsmen, and the gold trade.[28] Though not located in a gold producing zone, Great Accra leveraged its middleman status to control a third of gold exports on the Gold Coast. Through the seventeenth century, the Ga people also occupied middleman roles as traders, the wives of European merchants, and translators of European languages for their Akan-speaking neighbors.[29]

In much of Africa people entered the transatlantic slave trade as captives for sale, but on the Gold Coast the Ga and Fante exchanged goods with Europeans for Africans captured elsewhere on the continent, such as the Bight of Biafra and Kongo, and transported there by Portuguese traders.[30] Until the second half of the seventeenth century, and the fall of Great Accra, few slaves were exported from the Gold Coast to Europe, given the comparative advantage of African traders in the production and sale of gold.[31] The transition from exporting gold to slaves, however, expanded pre-existing techniques for capturing, transporting, and valuing human beings bound for bondage, and led to the innovation of new ones. Warfare among competing polities produced captives who were sold into the transatlantic economy. By the eighteenth century, European traders working on the Gold Coast described the presence also of mercenary kidnappers who roamed caravan routes and ambushed rural denizens who they then transported to the coast for sale.[32] These mercenaries, known as *siccadingers*, were largely comprised of single and often destitute men, many of whom were born to inland populations that fled toward the coast after their land was dispossessed by Akan wars of expansion and slave raiding.[33] African merchants and political elites hired *siccadingers* to *panyar* their enemies. *Panyarring*—a term derived from the Portuguese verb "to seize" (*penhorar*)—was a means of debt foreclosure and grievance resolution by manhunting that spread on the Gold Coast in the seventeenth century.[34] A group or individual hunted down a person who they then held hostage until the captive's kin or owner repaid a debt or resolved a violation or criminal offence. The implicit threat underlying *panyarring* was that captives could be sold into slavery if the debt for which they were captured was not repaid in full or on time. *Panyarring* was distinct from arbitrary kidnapping for ransom, since the former entailed a criminal, civil, or economic justification by a claimant. It was also distinct from pawning, which was the voluntary handing over of a person as a surety on a debt. Among the Ga, *panyarring* increased during years of famine and in times of political turmoil.[35]

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[28]Irene Odotei, 1995. "Pre-Colonial Economic Activities of Ga." *Institute of African Studies Research Review* (University of Ghana) 11, 1: 60–74; Ozanne, "Notes on the Early Historic Archaeology."

[29]Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 27.

[30]Philip Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43.

[31]Walter Rodney, "Gold and Slaves on the Gold Coast," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 10 (1969): 13–28, 14.

[32]Ludwig Rømer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea*, Selena Axelrod Winsnes, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[33]The term *siccadinger* was the nominalization into Danish of a creole word derived from the Portuguese verb *sacar*, "to pull out, extract, draw a gun" and "to drag out, derive gain, profit."

[34]Paul Lovejoy, "Pawnship and Seizure for Debt in the Process of Enslavement in West Africa," In Gwyn Campbell and Alessandro Stanziani, eds., *Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 77–90.

[35]Carl Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante, Based on Traditions and Historical Facts: Comprising a Period of More than Three Centuries from about 1500 to 1860* (published by the author, 1895), 377.

Panyarring was not only a political act in the visible world. By the eighteenth century, Ga people understood it to be an act taken by spirits against individuals and their families. Johannes Rask, a Danish Clergyman working at Christiansborg Castle in Accra from 1709–1712, wrote that among the Ga, "to be possessed, or as it is called in the country, to be panyarred by the fetish, is something truly remarkable."[36] In Ga, the term for this spiritual *panyarring* was wɔnmɔmɔ, literally "captured by the spirit," also translated by European travelers as "fetish-fury" and "madness." Spiritual capture among the Ga (wɔnmɔmɔ) was polyvalent: It entailed the duality of the concept of "asylum," whereby capturing spirits and their priests offered refuge to runaway slaves and therapy to the mentally distressed. It was an articulation of experiences of mental distress, through which West African and European observers discovered resonances and divergences in beliefs about health and healing. For West African observers, spiritual capture was a ritual manifestation of the psychological costs of the trauma of the trans-Atlantic slave trade reflected as a ritual debt owed to the capturing spirit, a temporary state of ritual awareness and insight, or an experience of a lifelong spiritual calling into the priesthood. For both European and West African slave masters, spiritual capture also carried the connotation of a punishable offence: a refusal to conform to human labor value as defined by trans-Atlantic economies of enslavement.

Ludvig Rømer, a Danish slave trader who worked in Accra several decades after Rask, described spiritual capture as coming about "suddenly and unconsciously."[37] In Rask's description, a person could be going about their daily lives when a spirit suddenly seized them, inciting behavior analogous to madness: talking to themselves or acting strangely enough to require supervision.[38] This condition, he explained, was often temporary (lasting only a day). Family and friends initiated therapy by gathering to play music in the home of the afflicted individual, who danced and shouted while naked. This gathering likely aimed to propitiate the capturing spirit, whose identity was reportedly revealed by the style of dance performed by the distressed person.[39] Although Rask was skeptical of Ga etiological claims about madness, his Ga interlocuters in Accra credited spiritual capture for signs of mental distress that lacked physical or observable causes. For Rask, if the possession was short, it was a "temporary confusion" or "momentary madness," such as when people—perhaps overcome by the "burning climate"—jumped off a high ledge. If a possession lasted longer, it was likely a ploy for prestige, a claim that one was closer to the spirit than others.[40] The longer the possession, Rask noted, the more likely it was that the afflicted person would seek out healing or refuge at a Ga shrine.[41]

Like spiritual capture, Ga shrines (*gbatsui*) played polyvalent roles both within Ga speaking communities and for migrants displaced by wars that produced captives

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[36]Rask, *Brief and Truthful Description*, 57.

[37]Rømer, *Reliable Account*, 92.

[38]Rask, *Brief and Truthful Description*, 57–60.

[39]Roberts, *Sharing the Burden*.

[40]In her study of Ga religious songs, ethnographer Marion Kilson suggested that wɔnmɔmɔ could lead to becoming the medium of a spirit: *Kpele Lala: Ga Religious Songs and Symbols* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013[1971]), 19–20; See also Dale Fitzgerald, *Spirit Mediumship and Seance Performance among the Ga of Southern Ghana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 51–55, 85–95.

[41]Rask, *Brief and Truthful Description*, 57–60.

and competition among Akan-speaking polities in the interior Gold Coast in the late eighteenth century. Shrine is a slippery and contested term. In this article, I draw on the archeologist Ann Stahl's definition of a shrine as "an installation of objects that serves as a ritualized focal point—for harnessing power, propitiating spirits or securing protection, among other possibilities." Stahl notes that these ritualized focal points are actualized through embodied practices (singing, dancing, praying) and the use of ephemeral substances (herbs, liquids, animal parts, and manufactured goods).[42] In the Atlantic era, shrines were centers of political asylum for runaway slaves and debtors, oath-vehicles for binding people to their word and regulating decorum, and spaces of ritual ambivalence offering healing and harming services for dreadful ailments, including chronic mental distress. European travelers to the region referred to Ga shrines, and their patron spirits (*wɔn*) as "fetishes" and their prophets/mediums (*wulomei/ wɔntsemei/ woyei*) as "fetish priests."

While the term "fetish" has long been used to disparage African ritual practices, it emerges from a specific historical discursive field: the Atlantic-era Gold Coast. As described by the intellectual historian William Pietz, "fetish" is the English gloss of "*fetisso*," a Portuguese pidgin derivative of "*feitiço*" that emerged from Portuguese encounters in West Africa.[43] In the Gold Coast of the eighteenth century, fetishes were understood as containers for spirits and deities that came in two primary forms: objects from the natural world (such as rocks and trees) or ritual objects composed of natural elements (such as bark, leaves, wood, and hairs). Fetishes could be worn on the body as protective amulets. But the most powerful were kept in sacred groves or compounds that European travelers glossed as "shrines" or "fetishes."[44] Some shrines were ephemeral, created to commemorate a person, an encounter with a spirit, or even a battle.[45] Others were cultivated over the course of decades by shrine priests who gained notoriety for their connection to specific spirits. Priests presided over large compounds that contained a sanctified space—often marked by an assemblage of objects placed at the base of a rock formation or tree—where dozens of people lived and worked for the shrine priest.[46] Many of the priests who maintained shrines began their service to a particular spirit after a bout of spiritual capture. Wulomei maintained their ritual materials, edifices, and associated agricultural fields, through the labor of men and women who confided themselves into their care. A picture of Ga shrine edifices emerges in the writings of Carl Christian Reindorf, a Ga theologian, historian, and healer of the mid-nineteenth century. Reindorf described

[42]Ann Stahl, "Metalworking and Ritualization: Negotiating Change through Improvisational Practice in Banda, Ghana," *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 26, 1 (2015): 53–71, 66. On the difficulties of defining shrine in the study of Africa's deeper past, see Timothy Insoll, "Introduction: Shrines, Substances and Medicine in Sub-Saharan Africa: Archaeological, Anthropological, and Historical Perspectives," *Anthropology & Medicine* 18, 2 (2011): 145–66.

[43]William Peitz, "The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism," *RES* 16 (1988): 105–24, 108; and "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *RES* 13 (1987): 23–45, 24. See also Paul Christopher Johnson, *Spirited Things: The Work of "Possession" in Afro-Atlantic Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[44]Gérard Chouin, "Archaeological Perspectives on Sacred Groves in Ghana," in Michael J. Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru, eds., *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics and Social Change* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008): 178–94; Insoll "Introduction"; Shumway, *Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*.

[45]Wazi Apoh and Kodzo Gavua, "Material Culture and Indigenous Spiritism: The Katamansu Archaeological 'Otutu' (Shrine)," *African Archaeological Review* 27, 3 (2010): 211–35.

[46]*Sakumotsoshishi*, "under the Sakumo tree," was a politically important nineteenth-century Ga shrine.

Ga shrines in Accra as having "only a single opening, which could be closed by a kind of mats [sic] made of fan-palm leaves."[47] These buildings were constructed of grass and stick thatched roofs, about 5.5 feet high, built in the shape of a pyramid "of sticks and swish or solid clay." Shrine furniture consisted of fan-palm baskets with lids that held precious items, such as beads, a commonly noted "fetish object."

Because West African merchants insisted on consecrating trade deals on shrines, European merchants were familiar with the importance of shrines as "oath-vehicles" (wɔntsone) used to bind people to their word and regulate decorum. In this capacity, the spirits contained in shrines captured, rendered mad, or killed those who owed socio-spiritual debts associated with breaking oaths: ritually significant social transgressions (bulemɔ) or punishments for not propitiating a shrine spirit (wɔntõmɔ).[48] Europeans pointed to Africans' belief in the oath-making power of these sacred objects as evidence of Africans' diminished mental capacity and inability to understand causation. This reflected their misunderstanding of the social function of oath-making in Afro-Atlantic contexts, and for that matter within European Christian frameworks.[49] Oaths did not verify the truth of statements through the force of magico-religious belief. Rather, when making oaths Africans invoked the names of ancestors, spirits, or deities to mobilize ordinary language into performative discourse that bridged the gap between spoken word and (f)acts (both action and truth).[50] Far from imputing power to inanimate things, and proving their inherent irrationality or madness, West Africans who made oaths on shrines understood that people, and social relations, empowered belief in the spirits at shrines. The value-making practices embedded in these dynamic human-spirit social relations at shrines empowered spirits to catch people who did not keep their word by causing mental distress.[51]

Scholars of Africa have long noted the ritual and ethical "ambivalence" of the oath-making power of shrine spirits and ritualized objects to both destroy and protect people.[52] Spirits not only captured oath-breakers by afflicting them with mental distress, but their shrines were also spaces of refuge for voluntary devotees fleeing the volatile social, political, and financial debt markets of the Atlantic-era Gold Coast. European observers proffered various explanations for this practice of asylum at shrines: as a deterrent against mistreatment of slaves, as a system of capital

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[47]Reindorf, History of the Gold Coast and Asante, 272.

[48]European merchants expressed frustration about contracts guaranteed by fetish oath, which Africans tended to keep with other Africans but less often with Europeans. Pieter de Marees, Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea, Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones, trans. and ed., vol. 5 (Oxford 1987[1602]); Willem Bosman, A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea (London: J. Knapton, 1721); Timothy F. Garrard, Akan Weights and the Gold Trade (London: Logman, 1980), 54.

[49]Matory, Fetish Revisited, 47.

[50]This misunderstanding eventually became the foil against which European understandings of erotic arousal (Freud), the "commodity fetish" (Marx), and citizenship (Hobbes and Locke) were debated. Giorgio Agamben, "II, 3, The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath," in The Omnibus Homo Sacer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 295–362; Paul Johnson, "An Atlantic Genealogy of "Spirit Possession," Comparative Studies in Society and History 53, 2 (2011): 393–425.

[51]Margaret Field, Search for Security: An Ethno-Psychiatric Study of Rural Ghana (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

[52]Examples include David Doris, Vigilant Things: On Thieves, Yoruba Anti-Aesthetics, and the Strange Fates of Ordinary Objects in Nigeria (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014); and John M. Janzen, Lemba, 1650–1930: A Drum of Affliction in Africa and the New World (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982).

accumulation by shrine priests, or even as a result of madness among the asylum seekers caused by being captured by the spirit.[53] As spaces of refuge, shrines facilitated subaltern modes of political belonging and kin-making for those on the periphery of civil society, including former slaves, debtors, religious dissidents, and migrants. In times of political insecurity and moral crisis, people fleeing enslavement or *panyarring*, and those in search of protective patrons, took refuge in shrines.[54] Thomas Edward Bowdich and Alfred Burdon Ellis, British explorers who visited the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century, and the British anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray, who worked in the region in the early twentieth century, observed that anyone willing to swear an oath of devotion to a spirit could seek political asylum at its shrine.[55] In 1819, Bowdich wrote, "A slave flying to a temple, may dash or devote himself to the fetish; but, by paying a fee of two ounces of gold and four sheep, any person shuts the door of the fetish house against all of his run away slaves."[56] Both European and African slave owners were known to pay shrine priests in gold and livestock to discourage these ritual leaders from accepting runaway slaves into their care. When payments did not secure release of runaways in their care, authorities threatened shrine priests with military force to reclaim them.[57] Paul Isert, Chief Surgeon at Christiansborg Castle in Accra in the mid-1780s, complained that one of his slaves fled to a shrine and the only person willing to help him retrieve the slave was a "mulatto soldier" who "admitted that from fear of the fetish he had been trembling throughout his entire body."[58] Johannes Rask, writing between 1708 and 1713, noted that shrine priests in Accra likewise feared the ritual consequences of handing over runaway slaves and sought to maintain plausible deniability, lest they face repercussions for breaking the trust of their communities and spirits. But if bribed, they might look the other way while armed Europeans recaptured the escapees.[59]

Pledging devotion to a shrine did not always release individuals from enslavement. If successfully ransomed or recaptured by their masters, runaways who sought asylum in shrines were often killed, as were "mad slaves" allegedly afflicted by spiritual capture. In Accra, Rask explained, "If a Negro who is a slave is frequently panyarred by the fetish, it usually costs him his life, since we have examples where the master has him, while in ecstasy, whipped to death."[60] Rask suggested that enslaved individuals who experienced bouts of madness in Accra cost their masters their labor value. In a morbid register, their value could lie in their death serving to warn other enslaved people to moderate their states of mind. Centuries later, in the 1970s, while developing decolonial "psychohistoriographic" care at the Bellevue Mental Hospital,

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[53]These asylum practices endured. By the early twentieth century, the principal fetishes of Accra had more people named after them than Accra's principal families, often headed by slave owners. A. B. Quartey-Papafio, *The Use of Names among the Gas or Accra People of the Gold Coast* (London: Royal African Society, 1914).

[54]Kwamina Dickson, *A Historical Geography of Ghana* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

[55]Maier, "Islam and the Idea of Asylum," 322.

[56]Thomas Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee (1819)* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[57]Maier, "Islam and the Idea of Asylum," 327–28.

[58]Paul Isert and Selena Winsnes, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert's "Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia" (1788)* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2007).

[59]Rask, *Brief and Truthful Description,* 59.

[60]Ibid.

Jamaican psychiatrist Frederick Hickling linked such rapid executions of "mad slaves" to subsequent European colonial beliefs that Africans did not experience mental distress.[61] Rask went on to note that Ga slaveholders ransomed runaway slaves from shrines simply to have them executed, suggesting that some enslaved people who ran away to shrines claimed they were captured by spirits. There are parallels between spiritual capture and "drapetomania," literally "runaway slave madness," the diagnostic category posited by American physician Samuel A. Cartwright in 1851 to pathologize the actions of runaway slaves in the United States as a form of mental illness.[62] While the etiologies of spiritual capture and drapetomania are distinct, they reveal fears among some slave-owning classes in both eighteenth-century West Africa (Rask) and nineteenth-century North America (Cartwright) that madness enacted a refusal to labor.

Legal historians of colonial North America have argued that some slaveholders feared that the enslaved might feign mental distress to evade labor.[63] European slavers in West Africa were also concerned about the impact a single mentally distressed enslaved person might have on the exchange value of the human cargo of an entire ship. This was also a point of discussion in abolitionist debates in Britain. In 1790, Clement Noble, a ship captain from a Liverpool-based family with a long history in slaving, testified in parliament about two mentally distressed slaves captured and transported on his ship.[64] Concerning the first, Noble remembered "a man slave on board his ship attempting to destroy himself, and believes the man was perfectly mad, is sure of it. Did not appear so at first or he should not have bought him." By the early nineteenth century, a system had been elaborated in the southern United States for adjudicating cases where a slave for sale from a newly arrived ship was presumed mad. Courts expected buyers to be aware of the perils of human beings as commodities. The buyer was liable for the cost of a distressed slave that, for example, committed suicide around the time of the sale. But the seller was responsible if the buyer never had the opportunity to inspect the slave.[65] The failure of Captain Brethaver, discussed in this paper's opening, to redress the sale of a supposedly "mad slave" in eighteenth-century Gold Coast resulted in his being *panyarred* by the Fante traders.[66]

The reason the extreme action of *panyarring* was taken in Brethaver's case is rendered clear by the remainder of Noble's testimony. The "mad slave," Noble noted, "stormed and made a great noise, worked with his hands, at etc [*sic*] and he showed every sign of being mad." Noble also mentioned "a woman who was insane and very troublesome, believes she did jump overboard once or oftener. Ordered her to be confined to prevent her from doing it again."[67] Captives had to be physically and

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[61]Frederick W. Hickling, *Decolonization of Psychiatry in Jamaica: Madnificent Irations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), esp. 11–39.

[62]Samuel Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race: Presented at the Medical Convention in Louisiana," *DeBow's Review* 11 (1851): 64–69, 331–36.

[63]Terri Snyder, *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Ariela J. Gross, *Double Character* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 67.

[64]"Abridgment of the Minutes of the Evidence Taken before a Committee of the Whole House to Whom It was Referred to Consider of the Slave Trade" (London: Parliament, House of Commons, 1789), 48.

[65]Wahl, *Bondsman's Burden*, 42.

[66]Shumway, *Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 60.

[67]"Abridgment of the Minutes," 48.

mentally fit enough to work. European medical doctors working on slave ships in West Africa assessed slaves before they boarded and rejected those deemed unfit for the harrowing journey. Dr. Thomas Winterbottom, physician to the Sierra Leone Company from 1792 to 1796, noted that slave traders in West Africa often deemed captives exhibiting physical signs of sleeping sickness unsalable because they entailed a disposition to "lethargy," which he considered a nervous condition.[68] A "mad slave," like the two discussed by Noble, would have threatened the successful transportation of other slaves. Guinea surgeons reported that "melancholia," which could spread rapidly among the enslaved, was a key factor in death by dysentery on some slave ships, as depressed slaves refused to eat or drink.[69] Noble surmised that slaves exhibiting melancholic symptoms were less likely to respond positively to medical intervention. Moreover, "mad slaves" offered no profit in the New World since their resale value was often equivalent to the costs incurred transporting them.[70] The Guinea surgeon Alexander Falconbridge reported success in treating melancholia by introducing drumming onto slave ships in the late 1700s, a technique similar to that of the Ga, who sang and danced for friends and kin afflicted by *wɔntɔmɔ*.[71]

Home-based practices of spiritual propitiation by dancing were a remedy for temporary states of madness. Shrines, by contrast, were spaces of care for the gravely ill and those suffering from severe psychological distress that exceeded the recourse of their kin and community. This latter role of shrines is highlighted in an account of mental healing by Dr. Robert Clarke, a British surgeon, judicial assessor, and legislator who worked for decades on the West African coast and published on topics ranging from the medical application of African bark to the etymology of insect species. Clarke began his career at Sierra Leone's Kissy Hospital and Lunatic Asylum, established in 1820 as the first British-run mental asylum in Africa. This was a time of immense religious, political, and economic upheaval. Though the British Parliament criminalized the slave trade in 1807, domestic slavery increased in the Gold Coast during much of the nineteenth century due to ongoing warfare stimulated by centuries of engagement in the transatlantic trade. Kissy was built to serve recaptured Africans: enslaved people freed by the British Navy patrolling for illegal slave trading ships along the West Africa coast after 1807.[72] There, Clarke wrote the first comprehensive study of sleeping sickness, which he described in psychological terms as a nervous disorder called "Lethargus."[73] He also theorized a link between

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[68]Thomas Winterbottom, *Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone: To which Is Added, an Account of the Present State of Medicine among Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 1, 29.

[69]Sheridan, "Guinea Surgeons," 604–5.

[70]Wahl, *Bondsman's Burden.*

[71]Falconbridge, *Account of the Slave Trade*, 30.

[72]Leland Bell, *Mental and Social Disorder in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Sierra Leone, 1787–1990* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1991); Sharla M. Fett, *Recaptured Africans: Surviving Slave Ships, Detention, and Dislocation in the Final Years of the Slave Trade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 85; Jake Richards, "The Adjudication of Slave Ship Captures, Coercive Intervention, and Value Exchange in Comparative Atlantic Perspective, ca. 1839–1870," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62, 4 (2020): 836–67.

[73]J. H. Elliott, "On Observation and Interpretation with Special Reference to Thomas Winterbottom," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 12, 2 (1942): 137–44, 137; Thomas Winterbottom, *Account*, 41; *London and Edinburgh Monthly Journal of Medical Science* 2 (1842): 321–33.

nostalgia and dirt-eating among melancholic patients.[74] In his capacity as a judicial accessor, Clarke even aided in the seizure of illegal slave trading ships attempting to leave the West African coast.[75] In 1858, he prepared a medical report for the Gold Coast, published as a forty-one-page standalone document in the journal of the Epidemiological Society in London.[76] Clarke's report contains the only known account of the "native treatment" of lunacy at a shrine among the Ga, who he called "Accras":

> A superficial observer might suppose, from the very few deranged or imbecile persons going about at large in the coast towns, that the inhabitants were seldom attacked by maniacal disease; but, from inquiries I have made on this subject, I am satisfied such is not the fact. Lunatics, it is true, are seldom seen in the coast towns, because their friends remove them into the bush as soon as possible after the maniacal paroxysm has been manifested; for the Fantees, Accras, and all the other races on the Gold Coast view madness with horror, and as bringing disgrace upon the afflicted party, his family, and friends. Suitable houses are therefore generally provided in the bush for the reception and medical treatment of the insane. In the neighborhood of Accra, persons suffering from mania are sent to the town of Teshia, a few miles distant from Accra. With respect to the mode of treatment adopted by their doctors in these native asylums, the primary objects aimed to appear to be the security of the patients and the prevention of harm being done by them, either to themselves or others, during the maniacal paroxysms. With these objects in view, the patients are carefully secured by fastening the wrist to a log of wood by staple, sufficient space being left between the log and staple to serve the purpose of a rude handcuff. If the lunatic is very violent, the ankles are similarly fastened. In this condition they lie or sit on the ground, where they are often much neglected, being allowed to become dirty and extremely loathsome. On the first appearance of the disease, the head is shaved, when pounded leaves and other cooling applications are kept on it to reduce its temperature, and to calm down mental irritation.[77]

Clarke's brief account suggests that by 1858, and likely far earlier based on other sources, the Ga relied on three primary techniques for healing severe mental distresses at shrines. First, they removed mentally distressed people roaming in urban spaces of Accra by transporting them to "native asylums" in the countryside. Second, they handcuffed them to logs of wood. Third, they used

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[74]Theories of nostalgia as a mental illness endemic to enslaved people circulated widely in the Iberian Atlantic world. Isabela Fraga," Sick Minds, Unproductive Bodies: Nostalgia, Slavery, and Feeling in Late-Eighteenth-Century Cuba," *Slavery & Abolition* (2021): 1–23.

[75]Letter from Acting Judge Stephen J. Hill to the Earl of Clarendon, 8 Oct. 1857, in *Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1858), vol. 61, 9.

[76]*The Reports Made for the Year to the Secretary of State Having the Department of the Colonies, in Continuation of the Reports Annually Made by the Governors of the British Colonies…* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1860), 28–29; Frederick Martin, *Handbook of Contemporary Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1870), 63.

[77]Robert Clarke, "Remarks on the Topography and Diseases of the Gold Coast; West Coast of Africa," *Transactions. Epidemiological Society of London* 1, pt. 1 (1860): 76–128; and *idem*, "Lunatics on the Gold Coast," *British Medical Journal* 1 (1861): 27.

"cooling applications" of herbs during treatment. I will now turn to examine how the material efficacies and ritual connotations of these three therapeutic practices—urban manhunts, logging, and cooling herb treatments—were adapted to the evolving social, ritual, political world of enslavement and mental distress on the nineteenth-century Gold Coast. I build this picture of mental healing at Ga shrines by comparing Clarke's report with archeological sources, documents on lunacy from the Ghanaian and British national archives, European merchant and slave ship surgeon travelogues, British parliamentary debates, nineteenth-century ethnographies by Ga intellectuals, missionary-produced Ga dictionaries, and ethnographic studies of Ga healing practices from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Spiritual Pawning at "Native Asylums" in Nineteenth-Century Accra

In Atlantic-era West Africa, shrine priests were creditors of ritual transactions that braided processes of religious and commercial valuation.[78] Healing for chronic mental distresses was a form of labor capital recuperation: converting spiritually captured individuals, deemed unfit for enslavement, into disposable and salable laborers in the shrine.[79] This mental healing dimension of the shrine as "native asylum" I call *spiritual pawning*. Pawning was the practice of a debtor (*nyɔmɔtse*) giving one's kin (*wekubii*) over to a creditor (*falɔ/frilɔ/sikatse*) as security until a debt was fully repaid. The pawn (*awoba*) lived with and labored for the creditor's family. This labor covered the cost of their room and board and the interest (*hekpa*) on the debt but not the principal (*nyɔmɔ*), which the primary debtor had to pay in order to reconstitute the pawn. While "mad slaves" were said to have been "*panyarred* by the fetish" or captured by the spirit, runaway slaves and free debtors who fled to shrines (*wɔnbɔ*) were said to have pawned themselves to the spirit.[80] *Panyarring*—both physical and spiritual capture—facilitated the immediate foreclosure of unsecured debts via the threat of dreadful consequences. Pawning, by contrast, allowed people and spirits to secure their investments without the use of force, ensuring the trade relationships that facilitated the exchange in African people for gold, guns, and other commodities. By the 1920s, the British colonial government in the Gold Coast hinted at the relationship between institutions of pawning and shrine care when a Ga spirit medium (*woyoo*) was convicted of "holding a person in pawn," for using ritual claims to coerce people into staying in her shrine. Scholars have also linked pawning to *trokosi*, a more contemporary West African practice of sending young virgin girls to shrines as stand-ins to atone for the religious offences of family members.[81]

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[78]As Jane Guyer notes, some shrines operated as savings banks, with spirits protecting investments from theft by capturing offenders: *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 77–82.

[79]Falconbridge reported that "mad slaves" were sold in lucid moments after periods of healing; *Account of the Slave Trade*, 32.

[80]Ray Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

[81]Scholars have noted the convergence between pawning and ritual kinship at shrines in colonial and postcolonial West Africa but have not discussed the relationship of these practices to mental healing. Ebiegberi J. Alagoa and M. Atei Okorobia, "Pawnship in Nembe, Niger Delta," in Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder: Westview, 1994): 71–82; Sandra E. Greene, "Spirit Possession, Ritual Self-Cutting and Debt Bondage: An Analysis of

Spiritual pawning was a repertoire of earthly practices that actualized ritual processes for remaking subjectivity and collectively revaluing mentally distressed individuals. There is evidence that spiritual pawning, or closely related practices, took place at shrines managed by not only Ga priests but also by priests of diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds across the Gold Coast. For example, historian Sandra Greene examines the testimony of Tenu Kwami, an Ewe-speaking healer and former pawn, who was spiritually captured multiple times and taken repeatedly by his natal and host families to a shrine for healing in the early to mid-1800s. On one of his six visits to the shrine, the capturing spirit asked him to return to his natal home in Kpenoe. His accompanying kin, however, deemed the spirit's request economically intolerable because moving would effectively foreclose Tenu Kwami's status as a pawn. After being healed, he returned to his host family to continue his debt bondage. As his case suggests, by the early nineteenth century some families and pawn holders in the Gold Coast brought their kin to shrines to be healed for the explicit purpose of further exploiting their labor. The shrine priests of this capturing spirit, moreover, knowingly arranged with Tenu Kwami's natal and host families to heal him for future captivity on no less than six occasions. As a system for recuperating ritual debts, spiritual pawning also transformed ties of kinship and reciprocal social responsibilities between the host of shrines (the shrine priest) and their clients (the spiritually captured).

Urban-Rural Therapeutic Manhunts

Transporting a mentally distressed person to Ga healing shrines in the mid-nineteenth century was organized around what the historian John Parker refers to as the urban-rural "moral topography" of Ga political and religious life.[82] Ga authorities located the civilizational heart of Ga language and culture in three original Ga urban seaside settlements, called the nshɔnamajii. By 1841, all three—Kinka (Dutch Accra), Nleshi (British Accra), and Osu (Danish Accra)—were densely populated, with a total of around fifteen thousand residents. While Ga authorities controlled these settlements, they were multi-ethnic, comprised of generations of immigrants from Akwamu, Fante, Nigeria, and Brazil.[83] Many strangers (gbɔi) became Ga through intermarriage, by fighting alongside the Ga in war, or by seeking political asylum from Ga chiefs (mantsemei).[84] Archeological and linguistic evidence also suggests that Ga religious practice was eclectic, adopting "exotic" ritual forms and materials acquired from encounters with neighboring polities and long-distance European and West African migrants.[85] Despite the

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the Testimony of a Nineteenth-Century West African Priest," *Slavery & Abolition* 38, 4 (2017): 745–60; Jonathan Roberts, *Sharing the Burden of Sickness: A History of Healing and Medicine in Accra* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021), 155; Sandra E. Greene, "Modern *Trokosi* and the 1807 Abolition in Ghana: Connecting Past and Present," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, 4 (2009): 959–74.

[82]Parker, *Making the Town*, 7. For archeological perspectives on the organization of political space in Atlantic-era West Africa, see Cameron Monroe and Akinwumi Ogundiran, eds., *Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa: Archaeological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[83]Kilson, *Kpele Lala*, 6.

[84]Naaborko Sackeyfio-Lenoch, *The Politics of Chieftaincy: Authority and Property in Colonial Ghana, 1920–1950* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014); Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade.*

[85]The adoption and incorporation of foreign materials and spirits into ritual forms was common in Atlantic-era West African religions. M. E. Kropp Dakubu, *Korle Meets the Sea: A Sociolinguistic History of*

assimilationist tendency of Ga religious practice, there was a widely shared ritual geography that contrasted life in town (*man*) against the inland country (*kose*)—which extended northward from the coastal *nshɔnamajii*—and the land of the dead (*gbohiiajen*). Ga urban residents of the *nshɔnamajii*, the *manbii*, fashioned themselves as more civilized than inhabitants of the countryside (*kosebii*, variously translated as bushmen, farmers, rough people, boors, clowns).

The *manbii* considered the presence of mentally distressed persons in town a threat to Ga civilizational norms and the welfare of families that could be endangered by the immoderation of such people. Ga residents, Dr. Clarke reported, looked down upon "lunatics in urban Accra" with "horror" and as a source of "disgrace." An explorer who visited Accra two years after Clarke's report also commented on the large number of hysterics and epileptics (both known as *gbligbliyelɔi*) that roamed the streets of Accra and were believed afflicted by spiritual capture (*wɔnmɔmɔ*).[86] According to Clarke, Ga families living in Osu, Kinka, and Nleshi man-hunted individuals exhibiting "maniacal paroxysm" and transported them to a native asylum in Teshie, a Ga seaside town located to the east of the first three *nshɔnamajii*. The native asylum located in Teshie may have been situated at or near the shrine to the deity Ogbede at the Kpeshie lagoon, the border between Teshie and La, another Ga seaside town. Dr. Clarke glossed Teshie as "the bush," which Ga of the nineteenth century understood as part of a relational geography. The bush could refer to any uncultivated land beyond cleared settlements and was also the domain of powerful spirits. On a regional scale, and from the perspective of the Ga *manbii*, the bush could encompass any area beyond the *nshɔnamajii*, including rural villages (*aklowai*) in the *kose*. Teshie occupied a distinct place in Ga moral topography given its proximity to the *husu* or *kona*, the outskirts of town or the entry to the bush. *Kona* was liminal space propitious for healing because it was lodged at the intersection of Ga urban civilization and the space of territorial spirits that resided in particular source-points in the uncultivated wilderness.

In the decades following the British criminalization of the slave trade in 1807, some Ga *manbii* retrenched this ritualized territorial distinction by settling their former bonded servants on land in the *kose*.[87] The civilizational politics of the *man-kose* moral topography emerged, in part, from the history of Ga political domination by successive inland Akan states (1677–1820).

Ga religious songs about the fall of Great Accra to the Akwamu relay these tensions. Reportedly, the Akwamu attacked the city-state because the Ga King circumcised an Akwamu prince. While circumcision was considered a sign of maturity and civility among the Ga, it barred Akan speakers from holding royal titles in their kingdoms. Thus, the fall of Great Accra was lamented in Ga religious songs with the refrain "you let uncircumcised people snatch all Great Accra" (*nye ha folɔi eha Nkranpɔn fee*).[88] In this ritualized political landscape, the town was associated with economic

Accra *(New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders, eds., Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014)*.

[86]Richard Burton, *Wanderings in West Africa from Liverpool to Fernando Po* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001[1863]), vol. 1, 171.

[87]Holger Weiss, "The Entangled Spaces of Edena, Oguaa and Osu: A Survey of Three Early Modern African Atlantic Towns, ca. 1650–1850," In Holger Weiss, ed., *Ports of Globalisation, Places of Creolisation: Nordic Possessions in the Atlantic World during the Era of the Slave Trade* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 36.

[88]Kilson, *Kpele Lala*, 258–60.

prosperity and its propitious proximity to the sea and the lagoons: the Ga's most revered "spirited geobodies."[89] The countryside, meanwhile, was associated with the risk of seizure by *siccadingers* and evoked the uncivil inland Akan world that dominated Accra for much of the Atlantic era. It is understandable that Ga moral topographies of the nineteenth century demarcated and shielded the urban and civilized *man* from the barbarous *kose*.[90] At the same time, the *kose* harbored spirits, bound in shrines, that were crucial to mental healing.

Teshie was ideally situated, far enough from town that the mentally distressed would not disturb the urban elites of Osu, Kinka, and Nleshi. But it was still proximate to the powerful spirits (*jemawɔn*) of the sea and the lagoons, as opposed to the less potent territorially bounded inland deities. In the *Gold Coast Colony Annual Report* of 1875, British officials noted "There is no separate establishment for lunatics. The few who come under notice are provided for by being sent into the Country under the charge of competent persons."[91] This brief note echoed Dr. Clarke's 1858 description of Ga removing the mentally distressed from urban centers into rural regions for treatment. It shows that a year after the British made Accra the capital of the Gold Coast colony, colonial officials were content to let Ga subjects organize mental health care and run their own mental health institutions. The British even provided aid to African families and healers, who they described as "competent persons," to carry out therapeutic manhunts of the mentally distressed from urban spaces to rural healing shrines.

Logging

Transporting the mentally distressed from urban to rural spaces for healing at Ga shrines was combined with methods of restraint and imprisonment. Logging (*bɔ moko akpā/akpābɔ*)—attaching persons by their hands or feet to carved log chains (*akpā*)—was the primary method of transporting mentally distressed persons in the mid-nineteenth century. In Dr. Clarke's description of a Ga native asylum, the mentally distressed were chained to logs by their arms, and if deemed "violent" by their ankles, to restrict their movements and prevent them from harming themselves. The use of logging as a psychotherapeutic technique emerges in other European accounts. Based on recollections from his time in West Africa from 1688 to 1701, Dutch merchant Willem Bosman wrote of a Gold Coast-born African translator for the English who put his wife "in chains" when she was feigning madness. That he threatened to sell her into slavery suggests that the chains were likely linked to logs.[92] Over a century later, the British colonial official Brodie Cruickshank wrote of two Fante princes who the King of Asante chained to logs to stop them from committing suicide, presumably due to mental distress.[93] As glimpsed in these accounts, logging

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[89] Robyn d'Avignon, "Spirited Geobodies: Producing Subterranean Property in Nineteenth-Century Bambuk, West Africa," *Technology and Culture* 61, 2 (2020): S20–S48.

[90] John Parker, "*Cultural Politics of Death; In My Time of Dying: A History of Death and the Dead in West Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

[91] Gold Coast Blue Book, Lunatic Asylum Return, 1875, 289.

[92] Chains were commonly fastened to a tree or to a log to restrict mobility. Bosman, *New and Accurate Description,* 355–56.

[93] Brodie Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa: Including an Account of the Native Tribes and Their Intercourse with Europeans*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853), 263–64. On potential

had a morally ambiguous therapeutic valence in mental healing, one likely tied to the Ga concept of medicine (*tsofa*)—tree (*tso*) roots (*fa*)—that could harm or heal physical ailments or social relations. Based on observations from the 1930s, the British anthropologist Margaret Field—the head of the Gold Coast's Anthropology Department in the late colonial period and a pioneer of ethnopsychiatry—noted that the meaning "of the word *tsofa*, tree-roots, has been greatly extended and is used to designate a great variety of substances such as machine-oil, paint, baking-powder, whitewash, gum, perfume, boot-polish, &c."[94] Wazi Apoh's and Kodzo Gavua's archeological excavations of a Ga shrine at Katamanso from the mid-1800s suggests that the expansion of *tsofa* that Field noted was longstanding.[95] Ann Stahl has likewise excavated miniaturized manacles at a blacksmith shrine dating to the sixteenth century in the northern reaches of the greater Gold Coast world.[96] These miniatures, which twentieth century ethnographers have observed in divination practices, are consecrated replicas of restraints that were typically attached to logs. Their presence suggests the importance of ritual protections against human and spiritual capture in West African polities prior to the rise of Atlantic-bound enslavement off the Gold Coast, since manacles were also used to restrain enslaved persons bound for trans-Saharan slave markets since the medieval period.

Logging as a method of restraint intensified in the seventeenth century with the growth of the transatlantic slave trade. In addition to its use in shrines, logging was used to transfer captives to coastal slave markets. African merchants used logs to link slaves, pawns, and *panyars* in caravans led from savanna markets to coastal forts. British abolitionists seized upon logging as evidence of the human indignity and barbarity of West Africa slavery. This is exemplified in a 1785 account of logging on the Gold Coast by the prominent British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson.

> The slaves here are usually brought down to the ships. They consist of such as come from the neighboring parts. They are brought down in droves by the black traders, who, in order to secure them, frequently place the right hand of each of them on a log of wood. A staple of a semicircular form is then fitted to the wrists, and the sharp ends of it driven down into the wood. Within this staple the wrist is included. In this manner being secured, they march along, at one time supporting the wood to which their wrist is fastened, upon their head, at another resting it in their left hand, as their ease requires. In this situation they are either sold to the natives on the shore, or to the people in the fort, who sell them again to the ships.[97]

Many Africans marched to the coast in log were sold to Europeans, while others were used as pawns and *panyars* by African traders and elites.[98] In response to an

reasons for suicide on the Gold Coast, see John Parker, "The Death of Adumissa: A Suicide at Cape Coast, Ghana, around 1800," *Africa* 91, 2 (2021): 205–25.

[94]Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga people* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 127.

[95]Wazi Apoh and Kodzo Gavua, "Material Culture and Indigenous Spiritism: The Katamansu Archaeological "Otutu" (Shrine)," *African Archaeological Review* 27, 3 (2010): 211–35.

[96]Stahl, "Metalworking and Ritualization," 62.

[97]Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1786), 30.

[98]Trevor Getz and Liz Clarke, *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 162.

inquiry regarding the state of the Gold Coast slave trade in 1789, John B. Weuves, former British Governor of the Gold Coast Committee of Merchants, spoke to the violence of logging. Unlike stocks—another wooden physical restraint that kept people bound to one location—logging was a technology designed for long-distance travel: it enabled slaves to be moved about and transported for sale. Like the ball and chain, it limited the speed at which captured persons could move, making escape difficult. The advantage of logging over the ball and chain, however, was that it could be readily fashioned or repaired from locally available wood.[99] In Weuve's words, "The slaves are not always chained when they are carried down to the Ships; but the Gold Coast Negroes, being the most turbulent of any, have a Log of Wood, of the Length of Three or Four Feet, and weighing Eighteen Pounds or more, flatted to their Arm; and when they walk, they carry it either on their Head or their Shoulders. The inland Negroes are allowed to walk about freely, with a Man before, and a Man behind, to prevent them from running away."[100]

Though the British slave trade was criminalized in 1807, logging remained ubiquitous on the Gold Coast for the remainder of the century. Slave ships continued to illegally transport captives to the Americas for decades after criminalization, and there was also an increase in slavery in West Africa itself as African elites purchased slaves originally destined for export for use as house servants and agricultural laborers.[101] In addition to their use in slave caravans and "native asylums," logs were used in what Europeans called "native prisons," spaces where African political and merchant elites held captives in confinement. As the threat of being sold into transatlantic slavery through *panyarring* for debt resolution lost its power, the new threat became imprisonment, which brought collective shame on families.[102] These native prisons, which proliferated on the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century, were often simply rooms full of people attached to logs.[103] In the Ga language, the phrase "*ye tsu mli*," which translates literally as "to be in a room," also carried the meaning "to be in prison." Similarly, the Ga word for "jailor" (*akpābɔlɔ*) was "one who chains others in log."

The close parallels between native prisons and native asylums underscores the ritual and moral ambivalence of logging as a core dimension of mental healing in shrines and also as a technique tied to the control of enslaved persons in West Africa and across the Atlantic world. As early as 1819, repeat runaways were chained to large logs to restrict their movement in the United States, the birthplace of the theory of drapetomania, since only one lunatic asylum accepted enslaved Africans as

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[99] On some of these tree species, see Raymond Dumett, "Tropical Forests and West African Enterprise: The Early History of the Ghana Timber Trade," *African Economic History* 29 (2001): 79–116.

[100] *Report of The Lords of the Committee of Council Appointed for the Consideration of all Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations…* (London: Great Britain Board of Trade, 1789), pt. 1, "Slaves," testimony of John B. Weuves.

[101] Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005); Anatole Klein, "Slavery and Akan Origins?" *Ethnohistory.* 41, 4 (1994): 627–27; Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*; Anatole Klein, "The Two Asantes: Competing Interpretations of 'Slavery' in Akan-Asante Culture and Society," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 12 (1980): 37–51.

[102] Balakrishnan, "Of Debt and Bondage." See also Erin Braatz, Governing Difference: Penal Policy and State Building on the Gold Coast, 1844–1957 (PhD diss., New York University, 2015).

[103] Balakrishnan, "Debt and Bondage."

patients.[104] Dr. Clarke's description of logging in native asylums thus also recalls the historical role of Ga healing shrines in the Gold Coast as spaces of political asylum for runaway slaves, another class of people that may have made their way to shrines with their legs and hands bound in log. Runaway slaves often became "fetish-domestics" (*wɔnwebii*, literally "servants of the spiritual family"), who took on names associated with the spirit and exchanged their labor for protection from former masters and slave-raiders. As a technique of capture and torture, but also of psychological healing, logging was integral to the broader regional economy of violence and displacement tied to the transatlantic slave trade.

Tracing the polyvalent uses of logging reveals how psychiatric care in West Africa developed alongside and in dialogue with the spiritual pawning techniques practiced by Ga priests at healing shrines. In 1893, the European-trained West African doctors and warders running the Accra Asylum began logging patients. This action was justified by appeals to material austerity and as an alternative to straightjacketing, which they viewed as better suited to a European climate.[105] Logging was used to restrain allegedly violent patients at the Accra Asylum until the 1930s. By the mid-twentieth century, studies of mental illness in the Gold Coast framed logging as a core component of "traditional" mental healing practices, which "compared favorably," in the view of some, with care at the Accra Asylum.[106] Despite massive shifts in the ideologies of treating mental distress since the end of the transatlantic slave trade, logging remains a salient practice in psychological healing in twenty-first-century West Africa.[107]

Cooling Leaves

Manhunting, logging, and removal of the mentally distressed to Ga shrines in "the bush" (*kose*) created a ritual and physical path toward mental healing in Atlantic-era Accra. Once patients were delivered to the native asylum, shrine priests used a range of techniques, focused on the patient's head, to redress the spiritual causes of mental illness. After shaving the head, they applied a plant-based pharmacotherapeutic remedy (*shikpɔn tsofa*) of pounded cooling leaves (*wɔnba*) to the bald scalp. This practice resonated with the mid-nineteenth-century Ga custom of cutting a leaf over the head of a newly acquired bondsmen to consecrate the exchange.[108] The application of such plant-based medicines on the scalp was a common practice for delirium and headache—both considered symptoms of various fevers and forms of mental distress—in many regions of West Africa. Dr. Thomas Winterbottom, for

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[104]Charles Nichols, *Many Thousand Gone: The Ex-Slaves' Account of Their Bondage and Freedom* (Leiden: Brill Archive, 1969), vol. 1, 19; Wendy Gonaver, *The Peculiar Institution and the Making of Modern Psychiatry, 1840–1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

[105]Letter from Gold Coast Governor Brandford Griffith to the Marquis of Rippon, 4 Nov. 1892, British National Archives CO 96/226.

[106]Geoffrey Tooth, *Studies in Mental Illness in the Gold Coast* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950), 64–65; Field, *Search for Security*, 237.

[107]Jocelyn Edwards, "Ghana's Mental Health Patients Confined to Prayer Camps," *Lancet* 383, 9911 (2014): 15–16; Benedict Carey, "The Chains of Mental Illness in West Africa," *New York Times* 12 (2015): A1; Brian Goldstone, "A Prayer's Chance: The Scandal of Mental Health in West Africa," *Harper's Magazine* (May 2017): n.p.

[108]Zimmerman, *Grammatical Sketch*, 77.

example, wrote of eighteen different plants commonly used in Sierra Leone in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as "cephalics": plant-based medicines applied externally to the body and head, and sometimes internally through the nostrils, to treat symptoms of fever.[109] Dr. Tedlie, who accompanied Bowdich on his mission to Asante in the late eighteenth century, also wrote of three different plants used as cephalics for headaches by Asante healers a few hundred miles inland from Accra near modern-day Kumasi.[110] Tedlie's contemporary, Henry Meredith, described treatment for fevers on the Gold Coast as follows: "The natives use frequent ablutions with warm water; after which, the body is rubbed over with certain herbs. If the head and joints be affected, a composition of pepper, lime-juice, &c. is applied; and when the person is free from fever, the bark of a certain tree, to which they impute the virtue of a restorative, is used in the same manner."[111]

Historians have noted the diverse geographic origins of the various plants examined by Tedlie, potentially suggesting the transatlantic trade's impact on the corpus of mental healing pharmacopeia in West Africa.[112] By the early seventeenth century, and likely before, healing herbs from across the globe could be found in the markets of Accra, a major port city and hub for the transport of all sorts of flora and fauna.[113] By the mid-nineteenth century, Dr. Thomas J. Hutchinson would apply the same techniques—shaving the head and "applying sedatives and sudorifics"—to Europeans in West Africa who were suffering from headaches and deliriums caused by fever.[114] Both African and European doctors working in nineteenth-century West Africa understood fever, like madness, as an illness with either a short prognosis (quick death) or a long treatment protocol due to recurring bouts of distress. Indeed, apart from spiritual capturing (wɔnmɔmɔ), the other Ga term for madness was *seke*, from the phrase "its back is long/it will take long" (*e see ke*). As documented by the anthropologist Leith Mulling, *seke* was a spiritual illness or breath illness (*mumɔ hela*) in Ga healing discourses.[115] The use of cooling leaves was palliative care, and a therapy of last resort. Those who recovered were considered fortunate.

Though Clarke's account is the only extant description of the use of cooling herbs for treating mental illness in Atlantic-era Accra, ethnographic accounts of Ga shrine healing in later generations offer suggestive insights into this therapeutic practice. For example, in the 1930s, Margaret Field described the use of cooling herbs in the treatment of spiritual sicknesses (*mumɔ hela*) such as madness.[116] In

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[109]Winterbottom, *Account*, 17–21.

[110]Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle*, 370–80.
Maier, "Islam and the Idea of Asylum," 327–28.

[111]Henry Meredith, *An Account of the Gold Coast of Africa: With a Brief History of the African Company* (London: Longman, 1812), 244.

[112]Abena Osseo-Asare, "Writing Medical Authority: The Rise of Literate Healers in Ghana, 1930–70," *Journal of African History* 57, 1 (2016): 69–91; Tom C. McCaskie, "'The Art or Mystery of Physick': Asante Medicinal Plants and the Western Ordering of Botanical Knowledge," *History in Africa* 44 (2017): 27–62.

[113]Roberts, *Sharing the Burden.*

[114]Thomas Hutchinson, *Impressions of Western Africa: With Remarks on the Diseases of the Climate and a Report on the Peculiarities of Trade Up the Rivers in the Bight of Biafra* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1858), 229, 243.

[115]Mullings, *Therapy, Ideology, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 65–67.

[116]Field, *Religion and Medicine*, 126–27.

many Ga shrines she visited, Field documented a process involving cooling herbs with close parallels to the one described eight decades earlier by Clarke, albeit with key distinctions. Shrine priests shaved the heads of patients upon their arrival and treated them in a steam bath infused with herbs pleasing to the spirit (*wɔn*) of the shrine. Shaving the head, Field noted, initiated a transition into a new state of being. Marion Kilson, an American anthropologist who worked among the Ga in the 1950s, described Ga healing practices as "redressive rituals performed to reestablish harmonious relations between divine and mortal beings which have become disordered through both intentional and unintentional human acts."[117] As Kilson showed, purification bathing and external medicines were the primary treatments for illnesses caused by supernatural forces, such as madness, at Ga healing shrines. The shrine priest often asked patients to drink some of the bath liquid—a genre of oath taking. Upon imbibing this liquid, the patient swore to abide by the rules and regulations of the shrine's spirit in exchange for healing. Treatment involved the periodic washing away of illness, thought to be the work of a *wɔn* who disturbed or displeased either of the patient's two souls (*kla* and *susuma*). Indeed, in Ga cosmology, each *wɔn* was associated with its own special herb that was used in cephalic preparations. At times, patients were denied common comforts or even beaten, "for if the sickness be made comfortable it may not want to go away."[118] In this description, we might glimpse the treatment ideology behind logging in these "native asylums" as a practice meant not only to physically restrain the mentally distressed, but also to make the spirits who "captured" the heads of these persons uncomfortable.[119]

In the nineteenth century, Ga shrine priests likely used cephalics throughout the duration of a patient's stay, to alleviate symptoms of madness but also to hasten the departure of malevolent spirits from their heads. Patients who were able also labored for the priests by tending to the shrine: sweeping the courtyard, cutting back undergrowth from paths linking the shrine to roadways, and cultivating cassava, yams, plantains, and other foods for shrine priests and their clients. We do not know how often these therapeutic protocols healed madness, or what other forms of therapy may have been used in psychological healing, including amulets, ritual incantations, and speech.[120] However, the repeated mentions of "thanksgiving" exit rituals at healing shrines, known as *awrɔke hamɔ*, suggest that some patients were considered cured of their mental distress. Cephalics were crucial to these exit ceremonies. Patients were bathed in consecrated leaves pleasing to the *kla*. *Awrɔke hamɔ* symbolized the washing away of the final traces of the illness.[121] Leith Mullings, in her ethnography of early postcolonial Ga mental healing in Accra, explained that shrine healers encouraged the kin of the mentally distressed to contribute toward the

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[117]Kilson, *Kpele Lala*, 24.

[118]Field, *Religion and Medicine*, 121–22.

[119]As a treatment for mental distress, logging shares a resonance with contemporary pharmacotherapeutic treatments, some of which effectively restrict the movement of patients through the side effect of weight gain.

[120]David Owusu-Ansah, "Islamic Influence in a Forest Kingdom: The Role of Protective Amulets in Early 19th Century Asante," *Transafrican Journal of History* 12 (1983): 100–33.

[121]Lily Kpobi and Leslie Swartz, "'That is how the real mad people behave': Beliefs About and Treatment of Mental Disorders by Traditional Medicine-Men in Accra, Ghana," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 64, 4 (2018): 309–16.

cost of treatment during *awrɔke hamɔ*. Without a monetary payment, the patient could not be "ceremoniously returned." This practice harkens back to the ransoming of runaway slaves from shrines and principal debt fees (*nyɔmɔ*) that families had to repay to recover their pawned kin in the eighteenth century. It reminds us of the imbrication of mental healing in the ritual and monetary economies of the transatlantic slave trade when shrine priests grew wealthy from amassing debtors and runaway slaves. They also generated human labor value by treating madness, thereby converting the unsaleable "mad slave" into a person of sound mind who could be bought and sold on open markets. Mental asylum seekers who were not healed remained spiritual pawns of the shrine spirit, working alongside the priest and other asylum seekers.

Conclusion

When shrine priests of the Atlantic era succeeded in healing mental maladies, they engaged in spiritual pawning: the ritual and commercial value conversion of mad persons, deemed unfit for bondage, into potential subjects of enslavement. In recreating the world in which spiritual pawning unfolded, this article has brought insights from the scholarship on "mad slaves" in the wider Atlantic sphere to bear on a study of mental healing in shrines overseen by Ga prophets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a time of intense violence and raiding. In so doing, it generates one of the first explorations of the relationship of madness and mental healing to enslavement in Atlantic-era West Africa. I have described the dynamic repertoire of mental treatment at Ga shrines: the moral relationship of urban and rural geographies to capture and healing, the management of forced mobility via logging, and the spiritual healing dynamics of cooling leaves applied to shaved heads. Scholars have highlighted the importance of shrines in West Africa during this period as spaces of political asylum, where shrine priests accepted runaway slaves and debtors as pawns, generating wealth-in-people. Shrines have been framed as nodes of African resistance to European encroachment on land and labor, as alternatives to European efforts to channel human labor, natural resources, and capital from the interior to the coast. But Ga shrines, I have argued here, were also mental "native asylums": institutions of psychotherapy that operated on landscapes of capture, healing, and moral politics that shaped the exchange value of human captives in the Atlantic world. There is a dark underbelly to this story. It is no coincidence that European colonial psychiatry in Africa began, in 1820 at the Kissy Hospital in Sierra Leone, as a West African ocean facing project to treat mentally distressed people recently liberated from illegal slave trading ships. For the value-problem of the "mad slave" in the political economy of healing in the Atlantic world lies at the heart of transformations in both colonial medicine and spiritual pawning.

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