The Language of Action: A Creative Study of Resistance to Slavery From West Africa to the Days Across the Sea

Kali Block-Steele

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The Language of Action:
A Creative Study of Resistance to Slavery from West Africa to the Days across the Sea

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Skidmore College
SIT Ghana: Origins of African Identity
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1 Sankofa, "return and get it" an Adinkra symbol showing how important it is to recognize and learn from the past.
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This journey in Ghana has been one of incredible growth, understanding and newfound knowledge. Her people have impacted me in such a profound way that I didn't fully realize until my time ran short here in Cape Coast. During my time here in Ghana everywhere I turned I found something wonderful; the kindness of the Ghanaian people, the relaxed pace of life, the sense of safety brought by strong community values, the beauty of the place itself, the power of being in such a historic place. I will forever be grateful for this time in my life and the people who have made it so.

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I give thanks for the wonderful people and the Elders of Sankana and Gwollu for letting me into an important part of your history; it has been so helpful for this project as I began to formulate my ideas, and for my own wellbeing and understanding.

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2 Asase ye duru, "the Earth has weight" symbolizing fate and knowledge of the divinity of Mother Earth and representing the importance of the Earth in sustaining life.  http://www.adinkra.org/htmls/adinkra/asas.html
Abstract

The goal of this paper is to study one of the lesser known aspects of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: resistance. Before the discussion of resistance, a brief history of the trade can be found. The focus on active resistance to slavery both on an individual and collective level begins on the African continent and continues through the Middle Passage, finishing with a discussion on forms of resistance in the Americas. There is a second part encompassing some creative writings inspired by the formation of this paper.

Methodology

The methods used for the construction of this project relied heavily on research from historical literature relating to the slave trade as well as insights gathered from Manu Herbstein’s well researched historical fiction novel *Ama: A Story of the Slave Trade*. Although there is more information out now about Africans and their ascendants resistance to slavery, it was still important and necessary to work at finding clues and interpreting information from other sources I read to draw connections between actions and reactions of the Europeans and those of the African captives. I also relied upon field visits to sites central to resistance on the continent for a better understanding of the active ways Africans resisted enslavement. I visited the villages of Sankana, Gwollu in Northern Ghana and was lucky enough to be a part of a meeting with the Elders of both villages. I also visited Elmina and Cape Coast slave castles.

For the poetry written in the second part, I relied upon inspiration received while researching and writing this paper.
Introduction

The goal of this Independent Study Project (ISP) is to tell a very important part of the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade that is not heard or acknowledged very frequently; resistance to slavery itself. From all I have read and witnessed I have realized that from before the time they were captured and well beyond the time they reached the Americas (if they survived), Africans were resisting against those who wanted to keep them subordinate. That is why in this essay I will talk about slavery on both an individual level as well as on a collective level; what African captives did in attempts to save themselves and how Africans of many different tribes, languages and ethnicities came together in attempts to fight against the position they were being forced into.

The first part of this ISP will be an essay discussing what I have learned through my research while the second part entails the creative aspect that will be the writings this research inspired. After a brief overview of the Transatlantic Slave Trade I will then write about resistance on the African continent against the raiders, during the journey to the coast and once in the slave castles of Elmina and Cape Coast. The paper will then continue on to the many forms of resistance that occurred on the slave ships during the Middle Passage and will conclude by a few forms of resistance as seen in the "New World."

I chose the topic of resistance to slavery because I felt that, at least thus far in my education, there has been a huge lack of any sort of solid information about Africans and African captives constant and active resisting and rebelling against the system of slavery. I found it hard to believe that in 400 years when millions and millions were being stolen and sold from home that there would be no resistance at all, on the continent or abroad, but the little I had learned about slavery had nothing to say about resistance of any sort. This made it seem as though for 400 years an entire continent of people were allowing outsiders to come in and buy their Sisters and Brothers and they had no opinion on it. So, by choosing to work on this subject I have been able to educate myself more on the many different ways my predecessors fought back through all stages of the system, while also being able to carry that knowledge with me to others.

And by adding the creative aspect to this ISP I feel I can bring to the research a whole different level of understanding. To me writing is an important way of storytelling, and in African and particularly West African traditions the form of oral storytelling holds a great importance and so I felt that bringing my own form of storytelling to this vital history would hold some significance. I also believe there is an emotional side to all stories that is more easily recognizable and felt in a different way when it is told through a creative lens. When having to write within the structure of an academic essay there is a much greater challenge to relate the emotional aspects of the history. So by placing an equal importance to the creative storytelling as to the essay I feel the history can be better felt and understood by all. I was inspired to do my project in this form by not only my passion for writing, but also by Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang’s Cape Coast Castle: A Collection of Poems.

3 Throughout this paper the term "New World" will be in quotations because of my belief that the Americas was not actually a new part of the world free for the taking, it was just a part of the world the European colonizers had not yet found. The North and South American continents were parts of the world with established civilizations, cultures, and peoples just as was Africa and Europe, there was nothing new about them on the grand scale. "New World" is a term established by "Western" scholars that I do not fully accept.
Part I

A Brief Overview of Transatlantic Slavery

The journey from home to the Americas for Africans sold, captured during war, or kidnapped was a long one. The trip from inner West Africa to the coast alone was long and treacherous and those captives who did not escape or die were likely bought and sold many times along the way. Many came from what is now known as northern Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali just to name a few. Most of the captives that reached the Slave Coast went through the Salaga slave market in modern north Ghana. In Salaga one can find many descendants of these slaves. Shaibu Inusah puts this into perspective, “...slavery dominated the activities here. Everybody here in Salaga is a descendant of a slave...except those of us who have moved in now. But you see people don’t feel easy speaking about it. But everybody knows the he is a descendant of slaves.”

Once in Salaga they were taken to Ouamkam Bayou; “Ouamkam means bathing, Bayou means slave. So literally it means ‘Bathing slaves.’” Ouamkam Bayou was the place where the slaves were bathed and rubbed with shea butter to give them a shine. They were then given food to eat to fatten them up after their long journey before being taken to the slave market to be sold. The chiefs would take some of the captives for themselves and then sell them to other buyers to make a profit. And although some stayed in Africa as domestic servants for African royalty, wealthy merchants and government officials, most made their way to the coast and then across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas.

When speaking about the Transatlantic Slave Trade many people often refer to Africans keeping ‘slaves’ for their own use, and this is true. There were many societies in Africa where those on the top of the hierarchy kept slaves; people like kings, queen mothers and government officials, but those were “mostly used for domestic purposes.” And one cannot really call them slaves but rather servants because they had “definite rights, and could sometimes own property or rise to public office,” things strictly denied to Africans on the other side of the Atlantic. Even the way they became servants was different; it could happen “as punishment for a crime, as payment for a family dept, or most commonly of all, by being captured as prisoners of war.” Having servants was seen as a status symbol, a way to show your power and wealth, rather than for commercial enterprises and profit as was done in the Americas.

But the system of slavery as instituted by Europeans was beneficial to some Africans as well, the royalty most especially. Early on in the 18th century the kings of modern Benin, known then as Dahomey, “became big powers in the slave trade, waging a bitter war on their neighbours, resulting in the capture of 10,000...” One king, King Tegbesu, was able to make £250,000 in the year 1750 strictly by selling people into slavery. Because of the kind of riches the African royalty accumulated by warring and selling their captured enemies into slavery, many did not want it to end. In the 1840s King Gezo said that “he would do anything the British wanted him to do apart from giving up [the] slave trade.”

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5 Ibid.
There is also often the question as to why Africans sold each other into slavery, but that question is often posed without consideration of the time. During the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade there was no such thing as a strictly African identity. Your identity “was based on kinship or membership of a specific kingdom or society,” and so if you had an enemy tribe with which you warred against and took prisoners of war from, it was then profitable to sell them into slavery to make money for your people. This was something the Europeans saw and utilized to their advantage because the Europeans did not have the know-how or the means to make their way into the continent itself, so in areas on the continent where slavery or servitude was not practiced like “among the Xhosa people of southern Africa, European captains were unable to buy slaves.” And there was an added incentive for Africans to actively capture and sell each other because the European traders brought commercial goods. Another part of this problem that is not given enough credence is that most Africans that were a part of the human trade as the buyers and sellers were the “rulers or wealthy and powerful merchants…”

In the mid-17th century the European demand for slaves became greater than the rate with which they were being supplied to the coast, and thus the Europeans took to initiating warfare and raids. The slave raiders were a great help for the Europeans, although it is debatable whether they fully understood the impact they were having on the continent. And the legacy of slavery and the slave raiders continues on with their descendents. Mohammed Ibrahim Babatu, “the great great grandson of Baba-ato (also known as Babatu)” who was an infamous Muslim slave trader born in Niger and an active raider in the North of Ghana during the 1880’s, knows and teaches about the history of his ancestor. He recognizes that Babatu and the other raiders saw nothing wrong with slavery because they were seeing it in the African context and didn’t know what the people were being used for once they were in the slave castles and beyond. “They were only aware that some of the slaves would serve others of the royal families within the sub-region.” In African society slaves were used, as previously stated, for domestic purposes, and could easily be considered a member of the tribe or region, especially through marriage. As seen in Manu Herbstein’s historical fiction novel Ama: A Story of the Slave Trade the Asantehemaa, the Queen Mother, gives Nandzi a new Asante name and thus she becomes an Asante. “It is Saturday today. I will call her Ama…From today your name is Ama…Ama is a good Asante name. We give it to a girl who is born on Saturday. Today you have been born again as an Asante girl.”

Babatu recognizes that what his ancestor did “has done a great deal of harm to the people of Africa…but some members of our family feel he was ignorant…we feel that what he did was fine, because it has given the family a great fame within the Dagomba society…He didn’t know they were going to plantations…he was ignorant…” But is a claim to ignorance enough to give pardon?

And one must not forget the Europeans part in this most cruel of trades. The Portuguese were some of the first Europeans on the West African coast, and came because of their hope for “wealth and material gain” while also having new colonies in the Americas that needed strong labor for their plantations. But the first Africans forcibly taken out of Africa were not taken across the Atlantic, but rather north to Europe. As early as the 1440s African captives were taken to Portugal and it is “estimated that by the early 16th century as much as

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Manu Herbstein, Ama: A Story of the Slave Trade, (Jhajjar, India: Bookman India, 2009) 72
10% of Lisbon’s population was of African descent.” At the beginning the Europeans were using Africans only as a supplement to the servitude that already existed in Europe amongst each other, but with their discovery of the America continent and the realization that the European and American workers were not sufficient for the intense work they were required for the Europeans began transporting Africans to the “New World.” As early as 1503 the Spanish had taken Africans from Europe to the Americas, and 15 years later the first captives were taken directly from Africa to America. Soon after that Britain, France and the Netherlands all began competing with Portugal and Spain for a share in the profits. This fight was seen most especially on the coast with active warring for possession of the forts and slave castles. Most of these stolen Africans came from an area of about 3,000 miles of the West African coast spanning from what is now Senegal all the way south to Angola.

The trade peaked in the 18th century with an estimated 6 million Africans forced to make the 4,000 mile journey across the Atlantic. Although an agreed upon number of Africans removed from the continent and taken elsewhere has not been found estimations usually range from 10 million who survived to, as Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison wrote in the beginning of her novel Beloved, ‘Sixty Million and More.” And with an estimation of between 27,000 and 54,000 ships successfully completing their voyage from Europe to Africa to the Americas from the 1500s to the 1800s it is possible for that number to be in any part of that range. But it is important to never forget that those millions had to make the forced march of many hundreds of miles before even reaching the castles on the coast and many millions died along the way, so it is impossible to truly know how many Africans were sacrificed to this vicious system.

Both Britain and the United States officially banned the human trade in 1807 and 1808 respectively, but it continued on for another 50 to 60 years after. And not until August of 1834 did freedom find its way to captives under British rule. In that year Parliament “declared all children under six free in the West Indies.” Those above the age of six then became apprentices with the manifestations of indentured servants; they were required to work for six more years with no pay while their previous owners received a great deal of financial compensation for the loss of their free slave labor. And in the United States although the active transport of African captives to the country had officially been ended over 50 years prior, plantation slavery did not end until the conclusion of the bloody and country dividing Civil War. But not until 1888 when the last remaining slaves in Brazil were freed did the institute of slavery with African captives and their decedents end.

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19 Walvin, 1.
Resistance on the Continent

"If any man should buy another man and compel him to his service and slavery without any agreement of that man to serve him, the enslaver is a robber and a defrauder of that man everyday. Wherefore it is as much the duty of a man who is robbed in that manner to get out of the hands of his enslaver as it is for any honest community of men to get out of the hands of rogues and villains."

Ottobah Cuguano

Throughout my formal education I learned little about the system of transatlantic slavery, and I learned even less, if anything, about active resistance to any part of the institution. Now as a college student and as a young woman I have begun to actively question what I was taught during my formative years in school before college and have realized that there is no way millions of people could be forcibly removed from their homes where they lived daily as an innately free human beings and without one person resisting at any point in over 400 years. To believe that all Africans of the time were docile and complacent while having to live in a state of constant preparedness for raiding, war or kidnapping seems to be a sick joke and visits to two villages in northern Ghana as well as trips to Elmina and Cape Coast castles have shown otherwise. I will begin with Gwollu.

Gwollu

My first visit was to Gwollu, a village that sits on the border of the Upper West Region of Ghana and southern Burkina Faso. During the tour the guide pointed north and told us we currently were looking at Burkina Faso. Before the time of the infamous raiders Babatu and Samori Gwollu was a quiet and peaceful place whose people dealt with all their problems and misunderstandings through dialogue. They felt that “there was no matter too delicate for words or too heavy for discourse...there was no knot the tongue was not entitled to disentangle.” But then began “incomprehensible things” that words could not describe. People would leave the village to do a daily chore, fetch water, go to the farm, take animals out to graze, and never return again. But when, very rarely, someone returned the returned with stories that, “in better times,” could have been put in a “volume of narratives of the mentally disturbed.” These people who returned told of being trapped in a net the way fishers trapped fish in a lake and then taken away on the back of horse, or witnessing it happen to others.

Disappearances and nightly attacks became so common that they had to construct new ways of daily life and work; some people would farm while others stood watch in trees. This worked until the raiders changed their game. At this point the people of Gwollu sent a delegation out to try and find the reason they were being attacked in such a way and found they were not alone, other settlements had been transformed into abandonment and ashes. Matters that still the tongue.” So they came together to think of new ways to protect themselves and resist against these raiders. They began to build their roofs with baked brick rather than thatch so “the raiders could not smoke us out like game,” they built short walls in the entrances of their homes to trip

21 See Appendix B for images.
22 Opoku-Agyemang, 28.
23 Ibid, 29.
any unknown person entering, and built the doors of their homes so narrow that only one person could enter at a time and so low that you had to bend or crawl through. But they still had to be on constant alert, because the raiding continued day and night.

Then their leader Tanja brought to the people the idea of building a wall like he had seen in what is now northern Nigeria—likely to protect against raiders as well—that would surround all the houses so that no one could enter. The building became a collective effort and a number one priority. They came up with a brilliant technology for producing bricks appropriate to their environment. They dug soil from the earth of their land and mixed it with water from the two water sources they called Kalgbei and Hapula. They let the mixture sit for a while and then more water and some grasses would be added for extra strength before the bricks would be formed. This produced a wall with many parts still standing over 200 years later. When they decided to build the wall, the guide said, they were building it to last as long as they would have to fight.

The building of the first wall took two years and covered ten kilometers, but they soon realized that they were not fully safe because people still had to leave the confines of the wall to farm, fetch water and take the animals out to graze. That was when they came together again to build the outer wall that surrounded the water sources, farm land and land for the animals. This second wall that covered another 15 kilometers took only one year to build. But just because they had the walls did not mean they still did not fight against the raiders. When visiting Gwollu we passed a shrine they call Takala, a large and powerful tree where they would go to consult the ancestors and provide sacrifice for them before going out to fight. They also came up with songs and dances that held many different uses. Some would bring the people together before going out to fight, others were praise songs that are still sung today to praise the elders who built the walls and fought against those trying to steal their freedom.

Sankana

Sankana, a small village in the Upper West region of Ghana, sits to the north west of Wa. It is a small village, but the size meant nothing when the ancestors of Sankana were fighting for their freedom and safety against the slave raiders. The people of Sankana were nomadic peoples who migrated from northern Africa. At times they would move because of environmental factors, but at other times they were forced to move for their own protection because of the slave raiders. The people of Sankana settled in the location they are still at today because of the environment they found. The village is situated amongst huge rock formations and caves that offered impregnable protection from the evil intentions of the raiders. And because they learned the land in ways the intruders could not they were able to stand up, even with small numbers, and fight.

On my visit we visited two caves, one large and one small; the small one is called “Siembogo, or porcupine hole. The porcupine makes itself impregnable when attacked.” The exact amount of people the small and large caves held is not known, but people from upwards of five to ten surrounding villages would hide
inside of them along with those of Sankana. Sankana was the central village and the largest. When the sentries at the watchtowers\(^3\), who were there day and night, saw people coming on horseback or any seemingly suspicious people they would sound a call. Once the people in the village heard that call they would transmit the message to other villages through the use of a talking drum or by sounding a known call on a cow horn or piece of carved wood shaped into a horn. Once the message was sounded the preparations began. The elderly, children, some women, the physically challenged and the ill were escorted to the caves with as much provisions as they could carry. They brought food like millet balls and a drink made from millet that is known to help the body retain fluid. The young and more physically able would stay outside of the caves to help prepare food supplies for those inside, to prepare gunpowder\(^4\) and to fight against the raiders if and when they arrived. Vigilance was required at all times. The fighters would also be armed with “bows, arrows, axes, machetes and any weapons they needed for protection.” The tips of the arrows were coated in a deadly poison made from *jiribi* and *yoo* plants that would be boiled for several days. Those who had refuge inside the caves would have to remain there until the threat of raiders was gone. This could be for “at least a couple of weeks at a time.”\(^5\)

Just like the people of Gwollu, the people of Sankana have many songs commemorating their brave history of resistance. Some of these songs can be found in Appendix A.

The Long Walk: Resistance While Traveling to the Coast

As can be seen by these two villages history of resistance, Africans were fighting back from the start. As Marcus Rediker, author of *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, wrote “enslavement produced immediate and spontaneous resistance, especially when the mode was raiding or kidnapping.”\(^6\) And similar histories like those in Sankana and Gwollu are sure to be found in many other villages across the continent and most especially in places where people lived in constant fear of raiders, which were many. But hometowns were not the only places where people fought back. As we know, many millions were captured and once captured a new journey began, an on foot journey where your freedom was being stolen with every step. Once in the coffles “the main form of resistance was running away.” If they could successfully escape they would attempt either to return home, or if they were too far from home, to build their own maroon societies, an action transported to the Americas.

But the captors were prepared for attempted escape and they worked to prevent it by many means, beginning with being armed. They also used other methods of control like binding each individual man and then connecting them in groups of two to four. They could be bound by anything from vine to chains. As seen in *Ama*, “...the blacksmiths manacled them in pairs, wrist to wrist, six pairs spaced a stride apart along a heavy chain.” The women were not bound or chained, but guarded nonetheless. While still in the hands of their African captors all the captives were used as porters, carrying head loads with items like food supplies for the journey in the form of millet or guinea corn, cotton and silk cloth, and possibly elephant tusks.\(^7\) Some of the enslavers even fashioned contraptions they inserted into the captives mouths to keep them from crying out and gaining sympathy from anyone along the way,\(^8\) which must have been a frequent occurrence that led to others aiding

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\(^3\) See Appendix C, Image 3.
\(^4\) See Appendix C, Image 6.
\(^5\) Opoku-Agyemang, 21-22.
\(^7\) Herbstein, 37.
\(^8\) Rediker, 100.
those captured. And because the whole goal of the caravans was to bring a certain number of captives as well as 
the products they carried upon their heads, to the next stage they could not afford to have others aid in 
rebellion. If running away did not work, captives also were known to refuse sustenance, hoping to die rather 
than be a slave. The idea that death would be better than slavery came from a commonly held West African 
spiritual belief that after death your soul migrated back to your home making death less daunting and more 
promising than their current condition.\textsuperscript{39} This belief played a large role in many forms of resistance, and came 
to play often during insurrections and resistance seen during the Middle Passage, which will be discussed later.

\textbf{No Light, No Air, No Food: Resistance and the Slave Castles}\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{center}
\textit{IN EVERLASTING MEMORY}\\
\textit{OF THE ANGUISH OF OUR ANCESTORS}\\
\textit{MAY THOSE WHO DIED REST IN PEACE}\\
\textit{MAY THOSE WHO RETURN FIND THEIR ROOTS}\\
\textit{MAY HUMANITY NEVER AGAIN PERPETRATE}\\
\textit{SUCH INJUSTICE AGAINST HUMANITY}\\
\textit{WE, THE LIVING, VOW TO UPHOLD THIS}\\
\end{center}

\begin{quotation}
--Plaque found in Elmina and Cape Coast Castles
\end{quotation}

Resistance did not end once the captives reached the massive stone forts designed to house them for months at a time, but rather those Europeans, to whose hands the Africans were now sold, had to be thoroughly 
prepared for the continued fighting back both from within and without. I visited both the Cape Coast and Elmina 
slave castles both of which had many cannons aimed in a few different directions, but most telling were the 
cannons aimed not just towards the ocean but onto land\textsuperscript{41}. The ones whose aim was into the Atlantic could be 
easily explained by the fact that different European nations were in a constant war for the castles and the 
capital they could amass from their human cargo, but the reason why cannons were aimed towards the land 
was not so clear, unless it was due to outside resistance. On my second tour of Elmina Castle I questioned the 
tour guide as to why there were so many cannons trained on the African soil which he attempted to explain by 
saying that when the castle was active they were not locked into one position, as can be seen in the images in 
the, but rather they were mobile and thus if attack came from the water they would wheel the guns pointing at 
the land and train them on the ocean.

His explanation could have almost succeeded if it were not for new information provided while we were 
in the governors' apartments. In the apartments was a door in the very back room that the guide told us led to a 
secret passageway the governor could use to escape if the castle was under siege\textsuperscript{42}. But when asked where the 
passageway led he informed us that his escape route would take him to the ocean where he could get away on a 
ship. But if the only attackers were Europeans coming from the ocean, as the guide said earlier in the tour, then 
why would the governors emergency escape route take him right into the his enemies arms? And why were 
such a large number of cannons needed if the only attackers would come from the ocean? Thus I could not 
believe his explanation of the use for the cannons directed on land. As Naana J.S. Opoku-Agyemang said in her

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 302.
\textsuperscript{40} See Appendix D for images.
\textsuperscript{41} See Appendix D, images 2-4.
\textsuperscript{42} See Appendix D, image 5.
inaugural lecture *Where There is No Silence: Articulations of Resistance to Enslavement*, “The canon balls that point towards land [should] alert the visitor to the fact that resistance came also from the land, and was a warning to the ‘trouble makers’ who had pursued the captured from inland in the hope of rescuing them.”\(^{43}\) This statement would make sense for Elmina Castle especially because not only did it have cannons pointing towards the ocean and the land, it also had a double moat surrounding the entire castle. What enemies were the constructors trying to keep out who were coming from the land?\(^{44}\)

And even if this tour guide\(^{45}\), and possibly others, would choose to deny or ignore the active resistance that occurred in all places, it is easily found in practically every surface of the castles, and on every tour in the script they are required to learn. For example, in the courtyard of the female dungeon of Elmina Castle was a cannon ball to which rebellious women were chained to for an indefinite amount of time. While chained they were not fed or given water, but forced to stay in the hot sun as an example to the other women of what happens if you resist your captors. In a similar fashion both castles have rooms for rebels where once you go you don’t come out with breath in your body\(^{46}\). In Cape Coast Castle there is a separate cell for women and for men, and in this castle I would hope to be a rebellious woman before a man because there the men’s punishments were much harsher. The women’s cell had a slot where they were provided some sustenance and thus some light and air, but in the men’s cell you walked through one door and then a second smaller door which would then be closed shutting out all light. The double doors made it impossible for any fresh air to enter and thus the captives would suck the oxygen out of the air and either starve or suffocate to death, whichever came first.

In the Elmina castle there is a harsh contrast of punishment for captives and for soldiers, and that contrast sits right next to each other. When walking into the main courtyard a glance to the right will reveal two cells, one automatically more ominous than the other, and during the tour you enter both. In the first cell the door is of thick iron in an open crisscross pattern that when closed allows for a strong breeze that is channeled through the entrance way of the castle and into a barred window; that is the cell where soldiers who “misbehaved” would be punished for offences like getting drunk and/or raping a female slave. They would be there for maybe a few hours, no more than a day. Separated only by a thick stone wall is the second cell. Above this cell is frightening skull and crossbones indicating to the viewer automatically that whatever occurred in that cell was not something one would hope for. Comparable to the Cape Coast castle’s cell for men, this cell was a place rebels where were sent to die. And when that door was shut and locked and darkness closed upon us I could feel the difference. There was a coating of fear and pain that was suffocating. Small streaks of light tried to make their way inside, but it was in such a way they almost seemed afraid of what they might find, and that is no surprise because in that cell many men and women had been left to starve. The only reason that bit of light could enter was so that the guards could peer in to see when to remove the bodies of dead captives.\(^ {47}\)

Even the door in Elmina castle known as “The Door of No Return” that the captives were forced to leave out of to climb into the canoes that would transport them to the ship was designed to ensure that no one would be able to escape. But the Europeans made as many attempts as possible to ensure the African captives were as dejected as possible before they even made it to the doorway. Once bought in the slave market they were

\(^{43}\) Opoku-Agyemang, 3.

\(^{44}\) See Appendix D, image 11.

\(^{45}\) I would like to thank the first tour guide I had in Elmina Castle while on the tour with the nine other women on this trip, his insight and explanations of events in the castle were invaluable. Sadly I do not know his name, but his knowledge I greatly appreciate.

\(^{46}\) See Appendix D, images 6-7.

\(^{47}\) See Appendix D, images 8-9.
branded like animals with their new owners seal. Then, once it was time to load the ships, they had to pass through two doorways, both of which were designed to force them to bend at the waist as they walked through naked, their first sight upon entering the next room likely being the face of a white European. The second passageway was even smaller, leaving no room for the Africans to doubt who was at least trying to control them.  

At first the Door of No Return was larger; they then constricted the space so that there was only enough room for emaciated Africans to slide out, most likely sideways. I would peg the reason for the alteration on numerous escapes and/or escape attempts that occurred when the door was larger. In Cape Coast castle the Door of No Return is much larger, likely owed to the fact that when exiting the castle the ocean was not right at the door, but rather the captives had to walk a short distance to enter into the canoes. This means that the soldiers could form a well armed passageway to discourage any escape attempts.

And once in the canoes most captors were sure to chain or tie the Africans to the boat to keep them from jumping out and trying to swim to shore, but not all of them did, and sometimes even pairs of men, shackled in twos, would attempt escape together. But this escape route was often hard because one must know how to swim in the rough waves, and there were many sharks that would follow the canoes and surround the main ships. This was because they were accustomed to feeding on the bodies of dead captives thrown ruthlessly into the ocean. In Marcus Rediker’s introduction he constructed a story of a woman who, while being transported from a castle to a slaver, chose to resist by jumping out of the canoe and swimming for a sandbar. The majority of the story was based on an accountant by a sailor named William Butterworth who travelled aboard the Hudibras in 1786 while a few other details came from many firsthand accounts.

...she jumped over the side, swimming furiously to escape her captors. No sooner had they hit the water than she heard a new commotion, looked over her shoulder, and saw them pulling themselves back into the canoe. As she waded onto the edge of the sandbar, she saw a large, stocky gray shark, about eight feet long, with a blunt, rounded snout and small eyes, gliding alongside the canoe as it came directly at her. Cursing, the men clubbed the shark with their paddles, beached the watercraft, jumped out, and waded, then loped after her. She had nowhere to run on the sandbar, and the shark made it impossible to return to the water. She fought, to no avail. The men lashed rough vine around her wrists and legs and threw her back into the bottom of the canoe.

This evidence and so much more just adds to the fact that the Africans who were once free never stopped fighting to regain that freedom, no matter the means. And although I have yet to find information on the exact forms of resistance that occurred within the castle, and where that information may lay I am unsure, it is of no doubt that resistance was as common inside the castle as the rape of the captured women. There is enough evidence in the buildings themselves to tell me that.

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48 See Appendix D, images 12-13.  
49 See Appendix D, images 14-15.  
50 Rediker, 2.
A Floating Prison Won’t Stop Our Bid for Freedom:  
Resistance during the Middle Passage

On a journey that, with the extreme help of violence, created a system of imprisonment and war while also working to institutionalize “race,”\textsuperscript{51} multiethnic, multilingual groups came together to actively resist and revolt against the place in which they were being forced. Aboard the slave ships that crossed the Atlantic ocean in droves many different people collided; the “hard-driving men”\textsuperscript{52} who turned easily to the whip known as the captains, the rough and “motley crew” and the African captives all of whom had their expected roles to play. It was the expected role of a “slave” and they way they were forced into that role that the Africans revolted against. They were revolting against being the pawns in an inhumane game, of being “things, not people: chattels, not humanity.”\textsuperscript{53} These prisoners, because those ships were floating prisons, were using “…a new language, a language of action employed every time people refused food, jumped over the side of the ship, or rose up in insurrection.”\textsuperscript{54} But, contrary to what Rediker said, this language was not entirely new, it was already a part of the body and soul of most captured Africans which they altered to fit their new found situation in the wooden worlds they found themselves. Even as the captain and the sailors worked tirelessly to “slowly transform [the African captives] into commodities for the international labor market” there came from them an “endlessly creative resistance from those being transported…”\textsuperscript{55}

And evidence of the constant fear of merchants, captains and sailors that their “chattel” would revolt is found with the sailors practice of always conducting a thorough search of the holds before sending the captives down below in hopes of ensuring there was nothing that could be used to pick the locks of the male prisoners (and rebellious females)\textsuperscript{56} shackles or used as a weapon.\textsuperscript{57} They were also sure to always have firearms nearby and be on constant watch of the holds and of the prisoners when on the main deck. And there was reason for their worry. “No matter how violent or brutal the consequences, enslaved Africans took any opportunity to free themselves [and/or] to harm those who had enslaved them...” On top of that, it is said that on about 8 out of every 10 voyages some form of uprising occurred.\textsuperscript{58} It was so frequent and bloody an occasion that profit driven merchants would warn their captains of it and charge them to be vigilant before a journey.

On a journey that could span one to three months with anywhere from 200 to 600 captives on board “packed like spoons” without even room enough to lay on their backs, forced to sleep and spend entire days in theirs and the other hundred plus captives urine, feces, vomit, blood and whatever else there was, it was no surprise that revolts occurred as frequently as they did. The conditions allowed for those who were innately rebellious, enough time to stew in their anger at the way they were treated and to gather up enough support from others treated in the same manner, to revolt. But it had to be deliberate. Rebellion was a well planned and organized act that required patience and careful timing before undertaking. They must have a good knowledge of the workings of the ship and also where the firearms were kept, if they hoped to be successful. And the women on board were an integral force in gathering that knowledge. Even though to a crew “every African

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 10.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 6.  
\textsuperscript{53} Walvin, 68.  
\textsuperscript{54} Rediker, 285.  
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 7.  
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, pg 11 of images insert.  
\textsuperscript{57} Robert Harms, \textit{The Dilligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade}, (USA: Basic Books, 2002), 305  
\textsuperscript{58} Recovered Histories, 26 April 2011. Although I have read and heard varying opinions about the frequency of uprisings.
captive regardless of age or sex was a potential rebel," women on board were still perceived as less of a threat and thus were allowed greater mobility, actually becoming a larger threat than imagined. Modern statistical studies show that “the greater the percentage of women on the ship the greater the likelihood of rebellion” because they had more freedom and could thus study the aspects of the ship the men had less access too. Not only did the women help carry tools, weapons, and messages to the men, they also helped plan insurrections, which is why there was a great effort on the part of captains to ensure the wall between the women and men’s quarters was as soundproof as possible.59

Although some insurrections were planned with the hopes of returning home, not all of them were. Many times captives used suicide as a form of resistance owed in part to a largely collective spiritual belief that your soul would go home to be with your ancestors and roam the land it had once known. Some of these insurrections occurred as a form of “collective suicide” with the hopes of achieving the death that was so longed for and taking down some of their oppressors at the same time.60 This belief of “going home” added to the view that death would be a happier occasion than what they had been living was so powerful that the captives made many different efforts to take their own lives. Olaudah Equiano, a former slave who freed himself by earning wages working on a ship expressed this view, “Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself. I envied them the freedom they enjoyed, and as often wished I could change my situation for theirs.”61

Jumping overboard was one of these ways to become an inhabitant of the deep. Because of the frequency of this type of action most ships had netting surrounding the deck in attempts to halt it. When the male slaves were on deck, most especially during the first few days away from the African continent, they were chained to ringbolts. And most ships captains always had their crews prepared to launch “emergency rescue parties.” The women of the ships also had a larger role in jumping overboard because of the freedom of movement they were granted (unless particularly rebellious) as written about earlier. In 1714 four women, one “big with child” jumped overboard while on the ship Florida as it was leaving port in Old Calabar. Three of the four escaped, and only the pregnant woman was caught because she could not swim as well as the rest in her pregnant state. The number of prisoners involved in the jumps could range from one, to group jumps of at least 100. These jumps could be spontaneous events, or inspired by a particular case of cruelty by the captain or crew. And, to captains and sailors surprise, the jumpers often expressed an extreme joy once in the water, exulting in the fact that they had finally escaped and were on their way to freedom and heading back home.62

Hunger strikes were also a chosen way to kill oneself in hopes of returning to Africa. Grown adults and small children alike refused to eat, but were punished severely since the act of refusing sustenance “posed a direct challenge to the captain’s power, as the example might spread, with disastrous results,” those results including, most importantly for the capital driven trade, a loss of profit for the captain. In order to protect against loss in ‘cargo’ the captains carried with them on the ships tools to force the captives to eat. These tools included: the cat, a nine tailed whip with knots on the end, thumbscrews, a “bolus knife” used to prop open the mouth, the speculum oris, which would be inserted into the mouth of the captive to force open the throat of the rebel who refused to eat, and a “horn” used in the same manner. But amongst this collective culture of resistance came many ways of getting around having to eat; the captured Africans would make a show of eating

59 Harms, 267-268.
60 Rediker, 303.
61 Ibid, 121.
while in front of the sailors, but when the sailors turned their back they spit out the food and threw it into the ocean.\textsuperscript{63}

As a deterrent to these different acts of suicide captains would terrorize some dead captives’ bodies who attempted revolt or resistance in any way. They terrorized the bodies because the belief of “going home” was accompanied by the belief held by most that they would return home in their own bodies. So if their body was beheaded, for example, or limbs removed they would have the fear of returning to their ancestors in a mutilated form. But for all the attempts at stopping the captives from resisting, in the end nothing truly worked simply for the fact that just months before all the people aboard the ships were free, roaming the land they grew up on without some overseers to decide the way they spent every moment, and while living in conditions actually suitable to humans, rather than conditions barely suitable for animals. And this resistance did not end when the survivors reached the Americas.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 286.
An Unending Horror: Resistance in the Americas

At the end of the twentieth century, the population of Brazil stood at some 165 million. Of every ten Brazilians, six are descended wholly or in part from African men and women who were transported across the Atlantic against their will during the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

--Manu Herbstein, *Ama: A Story of the Slave Trade*

Once the ships docked in their “New World” ports the Africans on board were “prepared for sale.” This entailed a ‘beefing up’ of the captives in attempts to make them as presentable as possible. They were then taken from the ships to warehouses and slave auctions where potential buyers would poke and prod in some of the most invasive ways, only adding to the many levels of humiliation the once completely free people had to endure. Manu Herbstein provides a sickening example of this humiliation on page 294 of his historical fiction novel *Ama*.

Now it was Tomba’s turn. He refused to rise and the two ushers had to force him to his feet. They held him, one at each arm...The old man extended his stick and tapped the muscles of Tomba’s arm. He turned and nodded his approval to one of the slaves who accompanied him...Then he pointed with his stick to the cloth which Tomba wore around his waist. Before Tomba knew what was happening, one of the ushers had grabbed the cloth, leaving him naked. Tomba swore violently and struggled to free himself, but the ushers knew their job. Calmly the old man extended his stick and used it to lift Tomba’s penis, adjusting his monocle with his free hand. Then, without another look at Tomba or the ushers, he passed on to the next slave.

What is so sickening about this excerpt is the fact that scenes like this one must have occurred with astonishing frequency. Meaning that African men and women resisted enough for the ushers to have to know their job well, and enough for the old buyer to have no reaction to Tomba, who was “a real man...[with] the body of a hero” and the height of a Baga, as he cursed and struggled violently. Another possibility for the white man’s lack of reaction could come from the fact that he, according to the character Ama after her own inspection, “had treated her as if she were no more than a tethered one-eyed goat up for sale in Yendi market.” Maybe he viewed Tomba as a riotous animal that just needed a little taming.

Quilombos and Palenques: Running Away as Resistance

Thus there is no surprise that, once arriving in a completely new environment where everything (except those Africans around who were forced there before) was unknown after having already spent months being dehumanized and forced to live in some of the most appalling conditions, these valiant people would continue on with the resistance that had built itself up into a culture all its own. And it began right away, as illustrated by the above excerpt. But the Africans resisted in many other ways once in the “New World.” One of the ways they resisted, a form of rebellion brought from Africa, was by forming maroon societies. These societies of escaped Africans could be found near any place where slaves were kept, especially in areas where the surrounding
wilderness provided good security, which, in those times, were many. For over four centuries these maroon communities “in remote, inaccessible regions of colonial lands: in the rugged interior of Jamaica’s 'Cockpit’ country, in the tropical forests of Surinam, in the inaccessible interior of Bahia”67 thrived and were known by many names: palenques, quilombos, mocambos, cumbes, ladeiras, mambises.68

The palenques could be small groups or powerful societies with thousands of members and continuing on for many generations, or even for centuries. And there are many descendents of these societies holding on to the independent spirit and pride of their ancestors. These ascendents should be proud because the courage it would take to decide to run away into a completely unknown wild in hopes of finding a welcoming society or starting one of your own is massive. There alone was the knowledge of what could happen if you got lost in the forest, like being eaten by wild animals or starving to death, on top of what would happen if you were recaptured. Because the Europeans despised these maroon societies which “appeared to be “the chronic plague” of New World plantation societies”, they reserved the cruelest of punishments for those who attempted such a feat. The Europeans hatred of the captives who attempted to govern themselves in their own civilization was so strong that many of their harshest punishments were even written into law. That hatred was only magnified by the fact that these communities, which slave owners knew surrounded them in every location, were a direct challenge to their self imposed “white authority” and a constant reminder that the people they were working so hard to steal humanity from were not relinquishing it quite so easily.

And the fear of punishment was not enough of a deterrent to stop those who decided they were going to try and take their humanity back. That is why some of the maroon societies outlasted the slave trade, “to emerge, in days of freedom, as independent-minded communities which persist to this day.” Sadly, others did not end as well. These others experienced violent and bloody conflict, as militias were often sent out in search of quilombos, especially when they retaliated in guerilla style, and mass suicides in the face of having to return to their lives as 'slaves’69.

Interesting is how much the etymology of the term maroon reveals about slavery and those who institutionalized it. The word comes from the Spanish word cimarrón, which referred originally to domestic cattle that had wandered into the hills of Hispaniola. It then began being used to refer to the Indian slaves that escaped from the Spanish, but by the end of the 1530s, when Africans had become the main source of labor, it was equated only to the runaway Africans. Besides that the term held a “strong connotation of “fierceness” and of being “wild” and “unbroken”. So these “wild” and “unbroken” slaves began running away from the cruel practices of the Europeans long before the work force was African.70

Although many captives ran away, not all ran in search of a maroon society. Simply running away alone was most common, and often they ran with a purpose like finding a loved one. Since the institution and “crude economics” of slavery was not sensitive to family and love bonds many people were sold and separated from those they loved. Mothers and fathers were separated from children; people were separated from their partners, parents, family, friends. But other times a person chose to run having come to the end of being able to tolerate “any more cavalier physical (and sexual) violence...” They, like many of their Sisters and Brothers who ran together and/or to quilombos, ran just to escape the constant brutality.71

67 Walvin, 114.
68 “Maroons and Their Communities”, Maroon societies: rebel slave communities in the Americas, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973) 1
69 To call someone a slave is to make them one, that is why I chose to write the word in such a format to acknowledge that is how the Africans and their ascendants were viewed and called, but that is not who they were.
70 “Maroons and Their Communities”, 1-2.
71 Walvin, 115.
An Owners Greatest Fear: Violence, Rebellions and Retributions

Because of the violence meted out daily upon the forced laborers of white society, the greatest fear of a slave holder was that that violence would be returned. There was a constant fear that the domestic and field workers might strike back at any time, and there was reason behind their fear, even though it was brought upon the Europeans themselves. “Slave colonies had penal codes more bloody than any comparable code in Europe. Corporal legally prescribed punishments were commonplace, providing readily available solutions to all sorts of slave transgressions…” which is how the worst possible punishments became legal for recaptured marooners. These legalized punishments on top of the “blows and lashes” the masters and overseers dealt out freely only added to their fear of “black retribution.” What if the slaves began acting like their slave owners?  

And at times they did. They took any opportunity to hurt or kill owners, or their children, fight back when beaten, ruin crops and products, destroy property, work slowly, feign sickness or stupidity, or simply rebel. Rebellions, although not that frequent, occurred more so in the West Indies and Brazil than in the United States, yet they happened everywhere. The small islands of Antigua and Grenada had revolts in 1735-6 and 1795-6 respectively, the larger island of Jamaica in 1760 and 1831-2, and even Barbados in 1816. In North America there were also major revolts: the Stono Rebellion of 1739 in Stono, South Carolina, “Denmark Vesey's conspiracy in 1822” and the infamous Nat Turner rebellion in 1831. Between the years 1807-1835 a mass amount of Africans were imported into Brazil leading to a long string of rebellions. But as the years progressed the slight humanity of the European response to the rebellions, through violence, regressed. Walvin chose to compare their irrational attacks on those who rebelled as “medieval”. It came to a point where outsiders questioned if it was even worth the Europeans maintaining the institution of slavery.

But the most successful, and yet most tragic, still remains the Haitian revolution that was successful in overthrowing their white masters leading to an independent Haiti. It lasted 13 years, from 1791 to 1804, and was the biggest threat slavery and the slave society had seen. That is why Europe, the Vatican included, and the Americas acted immediately, imposing embargos on the newly free nation and crippling it not only economically, but also politically and socially. It took 50 years for the Vatican to recognize it as a nation, and consistently in the 200 plus years following Haitian freedom the country has been attacked by the US, France and western Europe through military invasions, gunboat blockades, US supported coup d'états by Black dictators armed with US weapons, and reparations taken by France for a US equivalent of $21 billion which took Haiti over 120 years to pay off. All these actions taken by the ‘powerful West’ since the time Haiti has gained its independence show that the ‘West’ still does not want the image of a powerful and independent Black nation, especially one so important in the dramatic and ever present history of slavery.

But less dramatic than revolts, and much more common, was resistance in form of language and chosen aspects of acculturation. Because there was no common language amongst the Africans themselves they had to create one. They then acquired the language of their oppressors, while utilizing parts of it to build something all their own. The ascendants of Africans thus acquired new ways of speaking which evolved as the generations went on, and as new Africans entered into the picture. The result was Creole languages that, most often, the

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72 Ibid, 116.
73 Ibid, 116-117.
74 Ibid, 117.
75 Randall Robinson, “Haiti The Truth African-Americans Have Not Been Allowed to Know” in Ebony April 2010, 79
Europeans couldn't understand. Not only did the captured create new languages, they created a new African culture and practices by combining their individual cultures into one. They also resisted by practicing their traditional religions. This practice often had to be done in secrecy, but they came up with ways around that as well, which can be seen by the religion of Santeria originating in Cuba. Followers of Santeria often are members of the Catholic Church because the followers of the faith made connections between the Orishas and catholic saints, making it easier for the traditional form of religion to continue, with some new facets.

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76 Walvin, 119.
Part II

I dedicate this section of poetry to all those forced from their native homes to labor on land they no longer, or never, owned controlled by people no better than their own. Your blood, sweat, tears and pain will never be forgotten, and your seemingly never-ending pain will be validated in the end.

And to those who lost your mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, children, friends and lovers, taken away never to be seen again, your hurt, too, will always be a dark mark in the sad pages of this history.

And to those ascendents of our stolen forefamily whose roots have been hidden and ties to our previous homes destroyed, have faith, for one day we will all be reunited.

Life is full of twists and turns, but in the end we will all learn that mutual love and respect can be the way to better days.

77 This image is an Adinkra Symbol of West Africa called Aya, or “fern” standing as symbol of endurance and resourcefulness. The fern is a strong plant that can grow in harsh conditions, and when one dons this symbol it is a sign that they have endured many hardships and survived them. They are not afraid of life, or those trying to harm them. I feel it is a good representation of those resilient people who have lived and struggled before we, as well as a reminder that one must always fight and endure the hard days in order to see better ones.
Spirits of the Caves

Strength, 
riding fast and high 
searching 
for an easy meal. 
Spirit, 
running swift and silent 
refusing 
to be the easy kill.

Run Sister, 
   baby on back. 
Run Brother, 
   keep with the pack. 
Run Mother, 
   stooped with hard labor. 
Run Father, 
   and pray in your favor

because this fight 
will not be easily won.
These men, 
they come holding guns, 
firing at anything slight 
taking in it a huge delight.

So, if you can’t fight, 
then

Run.

Run.

Run.

To the caves 
set low below stone 
and high within hills 
and pray 
for the multitude 
strengthening rock 
with the pound 
-ing of gunpowder. 
Strengthening you 
with the pound 
-ing of millet flour.

Pray for the 
Sisters, the Brothers, 
stealing away like 
young lovers 
behind bush 
behind tree 
behind stone 
in wait 
for the men 
on horse thrones 
coming to take you from home 
and take away all you own 
to send you far 
into an unknown 
where only fear and survival 
can be sown,

Freely.

So pray that these 
strong of body 
and tough of heart 
can shoot down 
the intruders 
before they start 
raiding and 
invading 
any further.
They are on watch 
for your life 
day dark 
and day light. 
So dear 
Sister 
and Brother 
and Father 
and Mother 
stay strong 
and keep quiet, 
keep the babies 
from riot 
and in the rise and the fall 
of a few moons 
you will be free 
from the stone cocoon.
As free in heart and mind as you can be with the constant threat of two raiding baboons.

Sankana*

Your knife may be sharp, sharpened by years of careful planning and plotting, sharpened by gunpowder and firearms, bayonets and cannonballs, but our ‘Salon’ is ‘Kane’ and it cannot be broken.

Our will will not be sliced by your heavy and sharp knife. Our wit and our minds have an edge sharper than any blade and a might stronger than any raid.

So, catch us if you can Babatu and Sam.

Waiting in the rocks and hills we will be ready, our bows aim always steady and trained on you

So ride, bringing dust clouds in your wake. Try to be stealthy, but as long as you are awake, so will we be, always here to protect our people, and ensure that our only mistake was not being prepared from the start.

*Sankana- Name of the village of the Dagaare people who actively resisted the slave raiders. A fusion of the words ‘Salon’ meaning "Okra" and 'Kane' meaning
“hard,” means “that which cannot be broken.”

*Awawo-Igbo word for death.

**Awawo**

The Smell, permeating everything inside forcing its way, angrily, into each and every nostril. And down below with no place to go the grip is tighter than noose upon neck. You can scrub

and scrub

and scrub,

freshen with a new coat of vinegar, but the smell, the stench, will remain deep within the boards of this wooden hell turning every grain into a floating cell.

Awawo, it will never be the same.
How Will You Exercise Your Strength Now?

Dance, boy, dance.
Make those bare feet
prance, prance, prance.
You need your exercise

so,

Dance.

Then back down you go
to that stinking hole
stuffed fuller than full
with the stolen and sold.

But first, little monkey,
Dance.
Make them thighs
jiiiiiiive
to the rhythm of our fiddle and whips
underneath the big blue sky.
Suck in that oxygen now
because down below
you enter a world
of faints,
a place where candles
won’t glow.

So, move that body,
shake them feet,
wiggle your arms,
Dance to the beat
for soon you’ll be laying
like a spoon in a box,
unable to move
and stuck with your thoughts.

Your thoughts.
Your thoughts.

Listening to the crackling laughter
of the cracking souls,
the saddened tears
and hollow howls,
you’ll hope
and pray
to the ancestors
to carry you through
another day
boxed like less than an animal
sleeping in its own filth and waste.

Can you sleep now
little monkey?
Will you make it
through the night?
Will your thoughts overtake you?
Or are you going to fight?

Be strong,
strong as you can be,
right now,
stuck,
in this dark purgatory.
Think far ahead,
to an end of this game,
but remember, in the morning,
we’ll add to your shame.
So, you can be strong,
but you best
be ready
to

Dance.
A Wastage Game

How many Brothers
Will die today?
How many Sisters lives
Will end on the boats?

Oh, what a waste,
what a waste,
but this human wastage?
Well my dear,
it's business.
Business when trading
with bodies and minds.
Which is why
you plan for it
ahead of time.

Now, you may call me cruel,
or possibly
inhumane
but I see it more
as being ahead of the game.

We're the ones on top.
Yes, and we'll keep it that way
and if I'm doing business
of a...physical...sort
where roughly 45
of 300
will die before
they reach port
is it not bright
to calculate losses
before they are lost?

You may call it brutal,
but I just call it
smart.
Going Home, Going Home

I’d rather drown then be your slave, you self righteous soul.
Who are you to dare take me from my home and all those who care for me?

To try and make of me a beast in a human body good for nothing but tilling your soil and birthing your babies?

You say I have no humanity that a barbarian is all I can be that knowledge and overstanding are above my mental capacity just because you can’t understand me.

So you come to my home, build your fortresses out of solid stone, point your cannons onto the land we roam, send us guns and feed us lies about the people we thought we had known and after we fight our wars you buy us and ship us to lands unknown.

But now you wonder why I smile and rejoice as the clear salt water cools my skin.

Because I have escaped your floating purgatory, no longer forced to sleep in my own shit and pee, because I am now Free.

Going home
Going home

my soul is going home to be with my ancestors and roam the land my feet had known.
Wiseness is Not What You Deem

We are wiser than you think, when we swim is when you sink because our lives are always on the brink of being stolen.

And since we lived always on the brink and since our people were taken in droves, millions upon millions sent to foreign shores to plant and weed and sow. Our advantage in a growing world was lost, and then, so was our history. Destroyed by the descendents of greed wanting to steal from the pages of history, and the minds of our ascendants, knowledge of the strength, the power the wit, the resistance, the will of their ancestors.

Instead they have tried to make us fools with no pride, with no will to resist. And although those beliefs will be sorely missed (by some) in the long run the world will see. We are wiser than they thought, and we strongly fought not willing to be easily caught. And we will fight again, have always been fighting to win, back our Freedom.
The Time Has Come: Thoughtless Malice Can Last Only So Long

You, self proclaimed master, are really just a colonial bastard, working to steal from me all personal thoughts and liberties.

You have stolen me away from family, friends, and lands. Ripped me from all I have known to take me to a land where the seeds you’ve sown are drenched in blood.

The winds of malicious acts blow through every tree. The screams from shattered peoples ring from every hill and valley, and yet you want from me my ability to think and be free, my Identity, just so you can feed me a false reality.

Though many will fall to you and encourage your belief of righteousness in all you do, there will forever be US.

Standing firm and demanding from you an equality to which all are due, not just your chosen and select few.

Have you forgotten, or have you chosen to not remember, we are all Sisters, we are all Brothers and we can all be lovers of this beautiful life we have been given.

But for that reality to be present for all humanity, you must give me back my stolen liberties, must step off that well placed stool of false superiority and in turn reclaim your own humanity.

It is time for all people, not just your people, to be Free.
600 Years, No Longer.

You want to believe we are stupid and thus you’ve worked to make it so but, we are brighter than you think and in that direction we work to refuse to go. Yet your centuries of power and of keeping us in chains have had a huge impact on my Sisters and Brothers brains.

Congratulations are due to you, working from fear in all you do, putting your money in war and false retaliation, keeping our schools the lowest in the nation, creating an environment where “our schools” is normal.

You have (almost) succeeded in your plans, but you have missed one part. We have been rebellious from the start.

Yes, you had hoped this we would forget, but it is something that cannot be forgot. And through our rebellion is where we will begin and you will end, you old farts.

The time has come, for us all to take back our brains, and remove our mental chains, because we are suffering and suffocating ourselves by not having our real humanity. So I vow now to ensure to you all hoping we are so stupid, that soon enough you will be forced to recognize our brains, strong and proud and without your damn chains.
Conclusion

Although the percentage of people who actively resisted slavery and the role they had been forced to play was much smaller compared to the millions of Africans and their ascendants whose main focus was simple survival, the impact that those courageous souls had on their fellow captives and their oppressors cannot be forgot. Their rebellious spirit lives on in those who have come after them in music, writing, art and culture. But the legacy of these important people must live on with the remembrance of the lasting effects of the institution they were fighting against. The evil arms of the Transatlantic Slave Trade have imposed their cruel strength upon the entire world, leaving its greatest marks upon Africa, Europe and the Americas. Europe and its colonies in the Americas flourished with the huge amount of capital that poured into its coffers from sugar and other plantation farming. The civilizations of indigenous Indians from the Americas were destroyed, her people massacred by disease and European brutality, forced into slavery, and relegated to social and political spaces equal or lesser than those of the Africans depending strictly on their level of European acculturation once the labor of Africans was found more profitable. In Africa the huge loss of population encouraged by violence and tribal wars, left the continent in a state of complete disarray. The population was said to have stagnated or possibly even dropped, while the violence and distrust remained leaving her lands more violent and vulnerable to the colonizing forces of Europe that arrived after the end of legalized slavery.

Slavery, which with it was created the capitalist system around which this world now revolves, is one of the main reasons the 'West' reached the powerful position it has inhabited for centuries. This is all thanks to the establishment of Western wealth drenched in the blood of millions of American Indians and captured Africans. This wealth is the reason so many other peoples and parts of the world have been relegated to subordinate positions beneath the “power of the West.” And many people’s pockets were filled by the hard and dehumanizing labor of the Africans, throwing off the moral compass of many millions. Often when one thing goes in the wrong direction many others follow, and when the moral compass of those self-proclaimed holders of power began spinning off the charts, the creation of ‘race,’ and thus a total destruction of human equality, followed.\(^{78}\) This new creation of social inequality based strictly upon gradations of skin color has put its oppressive mark upon the entire world, leaving people to grow up hating their darker skin, valuing a lighter tone, and putting harsh and damaging chemicals upon their bodies in hopes of reducing a shade or two. But the damage to the minds is worse. And ‘race’ was not the only evil inequality that appeared through slavery. Because of the widely practiced, accepted and virtually institutionalized rape of millions of African women by the European owners and overseers has left a huge, unspoken, guilt that has manifested itself in a greater degradation and hyper sexualization of Black women.

But when people began to view the stolen Africans as a part of humanity rather than just a necessary tool for their own selfish gain and began making that view known, the institute of slavery began to falter.\(^{79}\) But it took much too long, and the evils of that system have yet to be fully destroyed; rather we can see them manifested in many other ways. This is why we must never forget, even when our heavy pockets try to tell us otherwise, to question where that “material well-being”\(^{80}\) comes from and object when our morals, love and compassion for our fellow humans are at stake. That is what happened during the time of the Transatlantic

\(^{78}\) Walvin, 2.  
\(^{79}\) Ibid, 68.  
\(^{80}\) Ibid, 3.
Slave Trade, and that continues to happen to this day. Where do the mass-produced clothes on our backs, and shoes on our feet come from? Can you hear the machines in the infamous but too-far-to-care sweatshops buzzing night and day or the voices of young women forced to work with a hardly livable pay? We must remember our past so that we can protect our future, and when one human in this world is suffering in inhumane conditions it becomes all of our responsibility to do something to fix it.
Appendix A: Songs from Gwollu and Sankana

Gwollu

Song to teach a lesson of unity:

*To tinna fa kon*
*Latnyina ne kan yaboi*
*A soa la guule puu kyula*
*Nia siyke be*

Meaning:

Observers should come and see
Our father used rock
To build our habitation
And covered it with kindness

Song in tribute to the leader Tanjia:

*Kafiala Nuale*
*Tanja suo Kaara lanta*

Meaning:

Our great chief Tanjia
Has put up a great wall
Wall for us
Every woman, man should be happy

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81 Opoku-Agyemang, 34-35.
Sankana\textsuperscript{82}

Song to convey the seriousness of their situation:

\textit{Tambo nang le}

Meaning:

The war that has occurred
Is a bloody war

Song to recall the bravery of the people even though their numbers were small:

\textit{Makpara moe}
\textit{Sankana guo ee}
\textit{Chama Wala}

Meaning:

When the raiders came
The people of Sankana stood firm
While those of Wa fled

Song to remember that at times the raiders took away their “whisk, symbol of confidence:”

\textit{Zambrama fa zuri}
\textit{Zo bewna}

Meaning:

The Zambrama man has collected my tail
It is bad

\textbf{Bibliography}


\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 23-25.
Appendix B: Images of Gwollu

**Image 1:** Tour guide in Gwollu standing in front of one of the largest remaining segments of the protective wall.

**Image 2:** Segment of wall with triangular shapes that allowed the people of Gwollu to look out and not be seen, as well as fire weapons without fear of being shot.
Image 3: Kalgbei pond, one of the two main water sources for the construction of the bricks for the protective wall. It is still used today in a similar fashion.

Image 4: Takala, the shrine for the people of Gwollu where they would sacrifice and consult before going out to fight the raiders.
Our welcome after visiting the segments of the protective walls. This dance and the accompanying song are used to praise and tell the history of their ancestors’ resistance. The songs and dances are taught to each young generation, subsequently carrying on the pride of their history indefinitely.

Meeting with the elders of Gwollu. We were lucky enough to speak with them after our visit to the wall and they imparted upon us some of their knowledge of their villages' important past.
Appendix C: Images of Sankana

**Image 1:** Tour guide in front of Siembogo, the small cave and first place we visited. Once the cave was full a large boulder would be placed in front of the entrance.

**Image 2:** Rocks where Siembogo is located, the entrance is to the right. A prime hiding spot because the cave blends in well with its surroundings.
Image 3: One of the areas utilized as a watchtower. The guards would post themselves on top of the large boulder to the left. The chosen men of the community did so in shifts.

Image 4: En route to the large cave. During the time of the raids this whole area, including the land in the other images, would have been covered in much more greenery making the villagers even harder to find. The cave is behind the tree, set up in the rock.

Image 5: Entrance to the large cave. The large rock on the right and some of the smaller pieces have broken off making the inside of the cave harder to see, and thus harder to imagine the amount of people able to be held within. The people of Sankana are working to find ways to remove this large stone in hopes of a better understanding of the caves capacity.
Image 6: Indent in the stone where millet was ground to make millet balls for those in the caves and homemade gunpowder was ground once they had possession of firearms taken from raiders.

Image 7: The Elders of Sankana whom we had the honor of meeting after visiting the caves. They shared with us their knowledge of their history and an honorary drink of fermented millet.

Appendix D: Images of Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles
Image 1: View of Elmina Slave Castle from the water. The name Elmina comes from the Portuguese description of the area, el mina, the mine, because they viewed this area of the African coast as a veritable mine for gold and other precious items.

Image 2: Six of the 15 or so cannons on this balcony in Cape Coast Castle that point out into the Atlantic Ocean.
Image 3: View from an upper balcony in Elmina Castle. Two of the 5 or so cannons that are directed onto African soil.

Image 4: Another view of cannons in Elmina Castle directed onto land. The cannon in the forefront of this image has a remnant of the device they were mounted on allowing for mobility of the weapons.
Image 5: Door in the governors’ apartments of Elmina Castle leading to his secret escape passageway that exits into the ocean.

Image 6: View from the governors’ balcony overlooking the female dungeons. The archways leading to darkness was one area where the women were kept. The cannon ball was where rebellious women were chained as a public example.
Image 7: Closer view of the cannon ball rebellious females were chained to in the center of the courtyard where they would be kept in the elements for as long as their enslavers deemed necessary.

Image 8: Entrance to the punishment cell in Elmina Castle where the rebellious captives were kept until they starved to death or died of dehydration.
Image 9: These two neighboring cells had two very different uses. To the right is the punishment cell for soldiers who “misbehaved” while to the left is the cell rebellious captives were sent to die.

Image 10: View of the female slave dungeon in Cape Coast Castle.

Image 11: The double moat system enclosing the Elmina Slave Castle which the tides would flood.
Image 12: First doorway leading to the Door of No Return in Elmina Castle. All captives were required to pass through, the doorway purposefully built to ensure all, but children, had to bend to clear.

Image 13: Second doorway all captives had to pass through before entering the last room they would ever inhabit in the Elmina castle. This one was built even smaller, in attempts to remind the captives who they were submitting themselves to, and where their station in life now was.

Image 14: Elmina Castle’s Door of No Return, purposefully shrunken in attempts to keep the hopelessly dejected Africans from escaping.

Image 15: Cape Coast Castle’s Door of No Return. The platform and stairway that captives once passed on is now a main area for the local fishermen, as evidenced by the fishing nets.