White-Washed: The “Conservation” of the Physical and Metaphysical States of Ghanaian Slave Castle-Dungeons and Forts

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Methodology

The methodology for this qualitative research is heavily reliant upon personal observation, photographic documentation, secondary source analysis, and interviews. It
was crucial to also develop personal observation through other sources like journals and museum professionals.

By visiting and thoroughly investigating Cape Coast Castle, St. George’s Castle (referred to as Elmina Castle), Fort Victoria, Fort St. Jago, and the English Fort in Komenda (respectively represented to the left), observations that deal with preservation tactics for the buildings and for memorializing slave castles and forts in Ghana can be addressed. Certainly these case studies are all located in the Central Region, but the differences and variety of preservation at each location allows for all of the castles and forts to be addressed in the following paper.

Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles are focused on in this paper and are highly invested in when compared to the rest of castles and forts found within Ghana. The forts vary from the once invested Fort St. Jago, the questionably sustained Fort Victoria, and the tragic case of the English Fort in Komenda. Through these five sites, the whole of slave castles and forts in Ghana can be critically critiqued and discussed due to their varied states. In the following paper the castles and forts will be referred to as slave castles and forts, to accurately describe them by simply using their name.

**Introduction**

The slave castles and forts that litter Ghana’s coast were the shipping points of human cargo during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Although Ghana was known for its wealth of gold, it too was consumed by European extortion of labor power. These sites of trauma, where millions of lives were forever changed and thousands perished, have been declared World Heritage sites by the United Nations’ Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.
These sites in Ghana include three Slave Castles and thirty-two forts.\(^1\) The sites are protected and owned by the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB). The national office is in Accra, but the Central Region branch is located within Cape Coast Slave Castle. “The monuments division of GMMB is primarily responsible for the protection, conservation, and management of all listed National and UNESCO World Heritage properties and sites in Ghana. The division ensures that the authenticity and integrity of the listed national heritage properties are preserved, maintained and demonstrated.”\(^2\) The Ghanaian government is to supply the GMMB with the necessary funds for the maintenance of these sites; however, the Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles both receive a significant amount of outside funding from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Smithsonian Institution. Other forts aren’t so fortunate and are left in disrepair. The task of preservation falls upon the GMMB, who must rely on outside institutions monetary support even though the capital the sites raise through visitor fees undoubtedly surpasses the amount allotted to them each year. The slave castles’ revenue is created by the booming industry of thanatourism, more commonly known as “dark tourism,” which is an industry that thrives from visitors who seek sites of trauma while traveling.

Preservation is supposed to be the GMMB’s primary task for the slave castles and forts that are scattered across the Ghanaian coast line. Preservation suggests a sort of “keep it as it is” mentality. However, the constant white-washing of both slave castles, the establishment


and inclusion of a small market inside the walls of the structures, and the attempt to redefine the space for the community, leads to a conceptualization of conservation which suggests sustaining the site for the sake of continued business and economic development. It is not for the sake of history and education.

In addition to the harmful effects that the physical changes have had to the sites, the representations are also damaged by the museum narratives. Museums are commonly known in the “West” as sources of education on various topics including art, science, and history. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines a museum as a non-profit making, permanent institution, in the service of society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment. In an article addressing the training of African museum professionals, African museums are redefined as:

An institution which collects, researches, preserves, stores, exhibits evidence of humankind’s history, environment, culture and technology in a structured educational and enjoyment manner, for the realisation and appreciation of the material evidence of humankind’s culture, technology and beliefs for the social and economic advancement of the community.

Both definitions state education and preservation as key concepts of museums; however, the most distinguishing difference between the two is the stark contrast on the role of profit. It is this disconnect in definitions that can be expanded to better understand the conservation efforts of the slave castles and forts within Ghana. Profit earning becomes an essential part of

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4 Akosua Adomako Ampofo and M.E. Kropp Dakubu “Knowledge Transmission in Ghana,” 143.
the slave castles and forts, which alters the experience of the visitor. In order to attract visitors, the narrative must appeal to and not condemn the anticipated “high-spending” visitors who are European and African-Americans. These appeals and avoidances of condemnation, which will be further examined, change and perversate the history of the sites.

“Objects have structural or coded meanings, which they can communicate: this is their symbolic meaning... objects have meaningful interest through their past associations: this is their historical meaning.”\(^5\) It is the task of the GMMB to properly preserve these sites in order to maintain their symbolic and historical meaning. Who is to blame for the false interpretations of the World Heritage sites in Ghana? Certainly the blame does not fall entirely upon the GMMB; outside funding affects the narrative of the sites. However, the outside funding is not completely responsible for the profit driven business that has become the true purpose of these sites. Because the government continues to withdraw from the revenue that the slave castles have been able to create, without any kind of real investment into true preservation of the institutions, disgrace and shame are placed upon these historically vital sites.

In addition to the well known heritage tourism aspect of travel to Ghana, which is “built upon the project of memory,” the slave castles and forts of Ghana also attract thanatourists. Over the past couple of decades, scholars and tourist experts have begun to investigate the

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boom in “thanatourism,” more commonly known as “dark tourism.” Before the physical and metaphysical state of the slave castles and forts in Ghana can be examined, dark tourism must first be further defined in order to understand the audience and the purpose of their visit.

Dark tourism includes an array of tourist attractions across the globe, ranging from battlefields to cemeteries to death camps. “Dark Camps of Genocide represents those sites and places which have genocide, atrocity and catastrophe... and thus occupy the darkest edges of the ‘dark tourism spectrum’.”

The slave castles and forts of Ghana would fall into this darkest category due to their location on-site of trauma; Auschwitz and Ground Zero also belong to this classification. It is at these sites - the sites of the actual trauma - that history is arguably in the most peril because of the heightened ability for the visitor to relate to victim or perpetrator due to the physical proximity of the event, the misrepresentation of either party is historically unethical. Thus the commercialization of the dark event must be carefully explained and examined in order to avoid desecration of the site.

In order to properly educate and preserve the memory of these sites, the audience or traveler who seeks thanatourism must be further explained and understood. The first individual is the “mea culpa” tourist meaning that the visitor has journeyed as a sort of penance. The second group of thanatourists searches for self-identification and is more commonly referred to as “root-tourism.” There are also visitors who visit exclusively for educational purposes. Visitors also exist who seek responsibility for the future or a “lest we forget/never again” attitude.

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Lastly are the uncommon, extreme visitors who seek gratification in violence and suffering. The slave castles and forts host African-Americans (root-tourism), Europeans (combination of mea culpa and lest we forget), and Ghanaians (combination of education and lest we forget), which mean that the needs of multiple types of visitors must be met by the site.

It is imperative that the GMMB, who are responsible for the slave castles and forts found within Ghana, understand the nature of dark tourism. “Disneyfication” is a process “in which pasts are condensed into easily consumed, bite-sized pieces lacking any authenticity.” This definition can be expanded to include the process of eliminating the evil of the history of an event for the ease of consumption. Thanatourists of Ghana seek to empathize or to embody an individual involved in the trauma and by visiting the site where that trauma occurred, this want is filled. It is not like the typical tourism, where individuals are seeking a shiny, untainted, attractive experience or a “Disneyfication” of the event. Thanatourists seek the horror of the site.

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In the late nineteenth century, American forests were being ravaged and destroyed by timber and lumber companies. The government came to recognize the problem when a group of natural conservationists pointed out the catastrophic affects of deforestation and the great loss of the “American Wilderness.” These conservationists pushed the government to establish

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regulations and laws in order to protect the future of American forests. The group was extremely successful with the help of President Theodore Roosevelt. The group later became divided when Gifford Pincht, the first head of the United States Forest Service, and John Muir, a leading conversationalist, had a disagreement over the meaning of conservation. Pincht, who was a forester by trade, felt as though the forests had to be protected in order to ensure their long-term viability and thus the sustainability of the American lumber trade; whereas Muir argued that the forest was more than a source of lumber. He believed it to be a place of “rest, inspiration, and prayer.”\textsuperscript{10} Pincht saw the management and maintenance of the American wilderness as utilitarian, which contradicted Muir’s belief that forests should be saved for future generations’ inspiration. This break in ideology led to the two different camps of conservationism. The first camp is known as conservationism and follows Gifford Pincht’s utilitarian view. The second camp is known as “preservationism” and follows Muir’s belief in “pure” preservation, or preservation for the sake of saving as is. While both groups had the same mission of saving the American wilderness, their motivations were not allied.

The slave castles and forts found in Ghana are over 5,000 miles from any U.S. National Park; however, the implications and differentiations illustrated by the argument of the early nineteenth century naturalists can be applied when examining the physical states of Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles, Fort St. Jago, Fort Victoria, and the English Fort in Komenda. The conservation methods of white-wash – painting the buildings, the creation of shops, the attempt at redefining the space as a place for the community, and the selective preservation of

money-making sites within the slave castles - illustrate how the GMMB’s original purpose has shifted from the Pincht concept of preservation to the Muir concept of conservation. And while there are other factors that must be taken into consideration, the GMMB has failed its primary responsibility of preserving the slave castles and forts. Certainly lack of funding and necessary facilities will limit the ability of the GMMB to properly preserve the structure. Unfortunately, the conservation that is done only creates economic opportunities and does not preserve making it utilitarianistic.

Not every instance of physical alteration is created by those in charge of the structure. As G.J. Ashworth points out, the visitor causes physical damage to the site by his or her very presence. “First, they physically damage the structures and artefacts they visit through their feet, hands, breath, sweat, digestive and microbiological systems.”¹¹ This is heightened at Cape Coast and Elmina Slaves Castles because of a lack of protective cases and signs requesting that certain items not be touched. “Secondly, their physical presence in large numbers destroys the ambience of the site.” This is certainly true at the slave castles; large groups of rowdy school children, large groups of tourists, etc. are commonly found within the walls of the structures. Their presence at these sites of trauma disrupts the solemn ambiance created by the space. By limiting the amount of visitors allowed in the slave castles at one time, this ambiance can be restored.

Another organization in charge of protecting some of the country’s most vital tourist attractions is the Ghana Heritage and Conservation Trust (GHCT). Essentially, this organization

is in charge of the natural sites like Kakum and Mole National Parks. At the Cape Coast Technical Institute, a museum workshop which houses a conservation laboratory was built for the maintenance of all the museums in Ghana and was to be shared between GHCT and GMMB; unfortunately due to bureaucratic issues, the workshop is controlled by the GHCT who greatly limit the accessibility of the GMMB thereby hindering its preservation efforts. Inside the workshop are tools for preservation - large printers for displays and a climate room for fragile artifacts. A lack of an archival system also creates a problem because there isn’t a place to store pieces of the buildings that are being replaced; therefore the original pieces of the structures are simply thrown away.

Another problem encountered at these sites is a lack of funding for the proper materials to preserve the items within the structures. For instance, the cannon balls and cannons are made of iron and must be coated with an expensive material, marine paint, in order to prevent the iron from rusting off. Instead of investing in a treatment that would properly save them from decay, a cheaper material is used that must be re-applied every three months. In addition to re-applying this material, its previous layer must be peeled off. Each time the cannons and cannonballs go through this conservation process, their original sizes are reduced. These issues, which could easily be solved through talks between the GHTC and more funding from the government, are haphazardly corrected and then pushed aside for the development of the economy.

It is imperative that these sites are properly preserved because of their importance in the narrative of human history. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade has forever shaped the world
and has affected all peoples. The obvious conservation tactic of literally white-washing the slave castles and forts is a disgrace to the memory of these sites of trauma. Ebenezer Collins Bordoh, the head curator of all the Central Region museums, explained the scientific complications of white-washing a building that is composed of both bricks from the mid-fifteenth century and cement that has recently been placed to fill cracks. While the bricks hold the white-wash, which is comprised of white paint and chemicals that prevent decay from the sea breeze, the cement is more porous and it does not retain the white-wash for more than three years before peeling occurs. Because of this, the slave castles must be repainted every two to three years. Bordoh, who is professionally trained as a chemical conservation specialist, says that he would never recommend the white-wash of the building because it is not a proper solution to real problem.

In addition to the logical and technical arguments against white-washing, there is also the argument of memory. What distortion is being created in the memory of the castles and forts when they undergo beatification through conservation instead of a sustainable preservation? This cosmetic restoration is clearly a conservation technique because it does little
to actually protect the building from the accelerated deterioration caused by its proximity to the sea. This tactic has been scrutinized before including an article written while the project was underway entitled *Don’t White Wash the Slave Trade*. By cleansing the walls through the white-wash, the historical record is also cleansed, eliminating some horrors of what happened.

Further affects of “Disneyfication” are demonstrated by Cape Coast Slave Castle’s gift shops. The inclusion of a gift shop within a museum or historical place is not unheard of and the action itself is not incriminating. However, the gift shops must be focused on the topic on which that site centers on. For instance, Elmina Slave Castle’s gift shop offers the classic tourist items such as postcards, bookmarks as well as literature on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Ghanaian history. Cape Coast’s gift shops create a colorful display of typical African tourist items like beads, kente cloth, “tourist” drums, brightly patterned dresses, wood carvings, etc. The merchandise in the shops within the former soldier quarters is the same found at outside stands that are run by hawkers. Essentially this area is a tourist trap meant to drain the wallets of willing tourists. These shops do not offer any additional resources for learning about the slave castle, nor do they offer Cape Coast Slave Castle specific items. “At various conferences and seminars on the slave trade they [African-Americans] have vented their anger because the forts and castles and other slave trade relics

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12 Don’t White Wash the Slave Trade
are being commercialized and used to promote tourism when in fact they should be memorialized as sacred sites.”\textsuperscript{13} The clear commercialization of the space completely destroys any memory formally encapsulated there.

Other problematic programs that are supported by the GMMB are the attempts at redefining the spaces of the slave castles. As stated before, the shops are located within the Cape Coast Slave Castle walls and are rented out to vendors. Another courtyard in the Cape Coast Castle is used as a performance space for a local cultural group and also serves as a space for some local craftsmen; both groups have to rent the space they use. Also found within Cape Coast Slave Castle is an art exhibition. The hall has been renovated and features a newly paneled ceiling and art gallery style lighting. This is perhaps the most perverse redefinition of a space within the slave castles and forts of Ghana because of what the space was. Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles both house art exhibits; the colorful art exhibition in Cape Coast Slave Castle is located inside the hall were slaves were brought in, thoroughly examined, and purchased by slave traders. This space is also rented. One of the last places human beings saw light for weeks and sometimes months has been converted into a space to sell stereotypical African art. This complete disregard for memory is disturbing. The memory is removed from the hall and eliminated from the narrative of the slave castle. These are all cases in which the GMMB has altered the memory of a space.

for monetary gains. Not all of the redefined spaces are rented however. A children’s library for the local community has been established within the Cape Coast Slave Castle. By redefining certain spaces within the structure it complicates where certain memory is allowed to inhabit. It is not possible for these sites to be viewed as both dark, historical sites and at the same time sites that develop the community through economic opportunities and libraries. By redefining the space, the GMMB is actually just re-appropriating the space for economic gain, which makes the action utilitarianistic and therefore conservation, and not preservation, is achieved.

Fort St. Jago, located next to Elmina Slave Castle, is another structure that has had attention paid to it by the GMMB through the use of USAID funds. “It was partly renovated in 1995,” but the hill it sits upon is eroding which puts the building in danger of collapsing. It was a low budget hotel in the seventies and the GMMB is “exploring possibilities to capitalize on the economic potential of the Fort” and the fort is currently “earmarked as an inn and a restaurant.” The road that leads to the fort is across the street from the entrance into the Elmina Slave Castle, but it is falling apart due to the erosion of the hill. Each visitor is required to pay two cedis in order to enter the fort; while this is a typical price, the collection process is unofficial. It is obvious that some money has been put into restoring this building because four of the rooms, that could be used by guests, have been painted and new wooden floors have been installed. Fort St. Jago has been white-washed and allows a visitor to safely navigate around the fort with the addition of new wooden stairs and ladders. It has not been fully

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14 Panel from Elmina Castle Photo DSC01777. In author’s possession
15 Panel from Elmina Castle Photo DSC01777. In author’s possession
conserved and makes nowhere near the revenue of the slave castles, but it is in better condition than most forts found in the area.

The most blatant form of conservationism is exemplified by the GMMB’s selective preservation. Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles and Fort St. Jago have been well conserved and are the most common sites visited in the Central Region by tourists seeking slave castles and forts. The efforts of the GMMB to pour its entire funds into the two largest tourists sites allows for their conservation mission to be unmistakably seen. The previously discussed physical alterations to the slave castles and forts, in addition to the further discussed metaphysical states, demonstrate selective preservation as a result of tourism and economic opportunities instead of historical preservation and exemplified by Fort Victoria in Cape Coast and the English Fort in Komenda. Fort Victoria is located behind the Mighty Victory Hotel. In order to go to the fort, foreign visitors must pay two cedis for a guide that will take them up to the fort for a bird’s eye view tour of Cape Coast’s historical buildings. The preservation of the fort is funded by the fees paid by tourists; a local man requested permission from the Cape Coast Municipal Metropolitan Assembly to collect fees in order to prevent the destruction of
the site. This fort is pretty well maintained, but has a pile of trash, at least one man living in it,

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17 Tour of Ft. Victoria. Video in author’s possession.
and local Ghanaian teenagers use it as a site for smoking. The overall structure was intact and

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18 When I was given a tour, there were three Ghanaians who were using the fort as a hang out and simply ignored the tour that was being conducted. The tour guide also ignored their presence.
has been white-washed at some point. The cannons do not show signs of rust, but the fort is
located further inland and probably does not suffer extreme wear of the sea breeze. It is also
placed upon a heavily wooded hill, which discourages the horrific extent of human encroachment as seen at the English Fort in Komenda.

The 1998 UNESCO report on the state of the slave castles and forts in Ghana listed the three threats to the World Heritage Sites including “environmental pressures, lack of buffer zones and developmental pressure, and lack of adequate funding for the regular maintenance and conservation of the sites.” The last two threats are unfortunately visible at the English Fort in Komenda. “The encroachment of human settlements and activities on the areas in the direct vicinity of the World Heritage sites, and subsequent erosion and pollution of the surrounding [area], create a serious threat to the safeguarding of the properties.”¹⁹ Human encroachment does not even begin to describe the scene there! People wash and dry their laundry on top of the structure, there is a “spot” inside one of the many areas used for holding slaves where cooking fires now litter the interior of the remaining structure, and people live in the former

storage facilities. Weeds grow around trash and people live inside the small building on the upper section of the fort. Within that same building, a Boy Scout emblem has been painted by a former troop who made it their mission in the early seventies to preserve the monument.\textsuperscript{20} The GMMB has neglected this site and as a result the fort is in complete disrepair. In the report, the UNESCO Committee “recommend priority be given to sustainable conservation and not to the rehabilitation of buildings for tourism purposes.”\textsuperscript{21} The UNESCO Committee saw what the GMMB was doing with the funds and sought to correct the problem by releasing this report and making suggestions. However, the physical evidence of the abandonment of Fort Victoria and the English Fort in Komenda in conjunction with the superfluous projects at Cape Coast Slave Castle, Elmina Slave Castles, and Fort St. Jago demonstrates, how the GMMB has continued its process of conservation for the sake of economic gain and not preservation for the safekeeping of humanity’s historical narrative. The literal white-washing of slave castles and forts helped remove some mildew and wear, but more importantly, it covered-up some of the buildings horrific history. Whatever decay they saved the buildings from, they exacted out upon the sites’ history via the control of museum narrative.

\textsuperscript{20} Menzah, Derrick. Personal interview. 23 November. 2011.
Metaphysics is a philosophical approach to the first principles of a “thing” including abstract concepts such as being, cause, identity, time, and space. When applied to the Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles their definition of metaphysical states are also determined by these first principles. In addition to the physical being of the slave castles and forts, which were previously discussed, the affects of conservation efforts also influence the identity, time, and space of these sites of trauma through the material of the slave castles’ museums and tour narratives.²²

As stated before, the role of a museum in Africa and the role of a museum in America are different. The field of museum studies is currently evolving in Ghana and is not to the

²² The tour narrative is not a large part of my argument because it is not constant; therefore its affects upon the metaphysical states of the slave castles varies.
standard of more established museum fields like South Africa or Kenya. The American museum is seen predominantly as an educational source that receives significant funding from the government, private organizations, and individuals. The Ghanaian museum is viewed as a source of education and is a stream of revenue. Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles both have museums within the sites. Cape Coast Slave Castle houses the *Crossroads of People, Crossroad of Trade* exhibition, while Elmina Slave Castle houses *Images of Elmina across the centuries*. To understand the theme of each museum and its effect on the metaphysical state of the slave castle, the narratives that define the museum and the visitors’ experience must be interpreted and analyzed.

*Cape Coast Castle Museum was established in 1970 as the West African Historical Museum* and was then renovated in 1994 by the GMMB with outside funding from UNDP, USAID, and the Smithsonian Institution. Additional counterpart funding came from the Ghanaian government, as well as NGOs. The title of the exhibition in Cape Coast Castle is *Crossroad of People, Crossroad of Trade* and focuses mainly on the culture of the Fante people and the relationship between them and European traders. It was never intended to be a permanent exhibit, but due to a lack of funding, has become the permanent exhibition. It is broken up into three different sections. The first is a fifty-five minute video that puts the exhibition into historical context; the visitor must request that the video is played, so most do not view it. Within the video Fante cultural traditions, the history of trade with Europeans, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the American Civil War, the Early American Civil Rights Movement, 

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23 Bordoh, Ebenezer Collins. Personal interview. 15 November. 2011.
25 "Ghana Museums & Monuments Board," Ghanamuseums.org
Ghanaian Independence, and the American Civil Rights Movement’s leaders Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. The video ends with a series of comparisons including the following: the Fante hunter with the black Olympian, Fante men playing on a beach with Muhammad Ali’s fights, traditional Fante dance with tap dancing minstrels, and a gyil (xylophone) player with Duke Ellington’s performances. It is appalling to see the last half of a video in a museum that focuses on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade narrate the history of the American civil rights movement. Certainly, the comparisons to the American Civil Rights Movement and the Ghanaian Independence Movement for independence are valid and informative. However, the prominence of an African American narrative is extremely evident and seemingly forced into the historical narrative. The comparisons at the end of the film are trivial and damage the overall argument of the film, that by examining the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, connections between Ghanaian and African American culture are obvious. This African American intensive narrative in the video is continued throughout the exhibition.

The second section of the museum is familiar to many Westerners due to the nature of its set up. The first portion of the exhibit focuses on pre-European history including a collection of stone ware, iron ware, and terracotta figures from across Ghana. This story is interrupted with the display entitled “Early Towns and Trade” that introduces the trans-Saharan Commercial Network and trade of slaves that “formed part of Africa’s export[s] to the Mediterranean from pre-Roman to Modern times.”

Lacking further explanation of the nature of this trade is a common defense for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The trans-Saharan slave trade...
trade is barely comparable to that of the Trans-Atlantic due to the number of slaves, the nature of slavery, and the method in which slaves were captured. The trans-Saharan slave was likely to be a war captive; whereas the trans-Atlantic slave could have been kidnapped or a war captive as a result of a war instigated by European traders. By excluding these facts, it facilitates ignorance and ambivalence towards the influence of Europeans in the trade of humans. Without an explanation for migrations across Africa and the development of clans, the inclusion of African involvement incriminates out of context. By choosing to disregard the complete history of African involvement in the trade, the burden of guilt is shouldered mostly by Europeans but also unfairly by Africans.

As the exhibit continues, it introduces Ghana’s abundance of gold and its importance in the early trade with Europeans. Early European contact is explained as well as the history of the Portuguese fort in Elmina, now known as Elmina Castle. The introduction of human trade is explained by the need for labor in the “New World’s” sugar cane fields. Again, the narrative is interrupted. A display entitled “The Legacy of European Trading Powers” shows the visitor the “positive cultural, social, and political manifestation” of European contact citing “formal education, literacy, and Christianity” as the positive components of European influence.27 All three positive influences also helped with the trade of slaves. The formal education was not the first source of education in Ghana because there was an informal system in place prior to European contact. The formal education was limited to the mulatto children of traders and the royal children of wealthy Africans. These children grew up to become prominent traders and negotiators during the slave trade; because of their literacy, some were able to become the

27 Display within “Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade” entitled “The Legacy of European Trading Powers”
vital link between Europeans and Africans. The introduction of Christianity is arguable as a source of “positive cultural... manifestation” because it is next to impossible to gage how the Ghanaian spirituality shift from traditional religion to Christianity has helped Ghana. Ironically, this display is located next to an enlarged image of a group of Africans in chains being marched through the jungle and serves as a perfect representation of neo-Colonial white-washing the metaphysical state of the slave castle.

The next three panels give very brief overview of the “Triangle Trade” and the treatment and condition of African slaves by depicting the 1789 infamous Brooke’s Slave Ship engraving. The visitor is forced to walk through a space that represents the interior of a slave ship. The tactic of recreating the experience for the visitor is usually a useful and impactful moment in the narrative of the exhibit, but due to the lack of detail given, the space becomes merely a half-hearted attempt at evoking emotion. The visitor walks out of the “hold” onto an elevated wooden platform, “The Auction Block,” as a display explains the Western front of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Again, the attempt at creating an experience is notable yet lacking.

The narrative continues with an answer to the question “What is the African Diaspora in the Americas?” There is a focus on “British North America” that is left unexplained, which includes depictions and brief summaries on several panels titled as the following: the Slave Labour System, the Emergence of New Black Cultures, Escaping to Freedom, Resistance to Slavery, Life after Slavery, Segregation in the United States, Migration, and Fighting for Rights in Modern America. In this section of the museum, which focuses on slavery in the Americas, there are several panels on resistance to slavery that highlight suicide, runaways, and famous members of the resistance movement such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. Again, the
A strong African-American narrative can be detected, but the exhibit has silenced African resistance. Before the trip to the Americas, many slaves fought for their freedom both on land and sea. Especially after the introduction of slave raids, many African villages were forced to defend themselves by creating walls\textsuperscript{28} and escaping to safety through the use of intricate cave systems like those found in Sankana, a village near Wa. Highlighting the types of chains used, without mentioning the resistance that slaves had to being captured and branded, disgraces the memory of those Africans who fought against the slave trade.

Images of famous African Americans scattered across the wall including Billie “Lady” Holiday, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, W.E.B. DuBois, Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Bob Marley, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stevie Wonder, Angela Davis, and Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington. Reasoning for the selection of these individuals, of whom only three are still alive, to be representatives of the “The African Diasporan People of Today” is not given. The visitor is left to assume it is because of their fame. The exhibit’s narrative concludes with a historic overview of Kwame Nkrumah’s fight for Ghanaian independence. The inclusion of Ghanaian independence after the introduction of African American struggles is an interesting parallel that should have been further highlighted, but it was cut short due to “the length of the African American narrative at the recommendation of the Smithsonian Institute.”\textsuperscript{29}

The domination of the donor is overwhelmingly present in the last section of this exhibit. The exhibit closes with the following quote by Marcus Garvey: “No one knows when the hour of


\textsuperscript{29}Bordoh, Ebenezer Collins. Personal interview. 16 November. 2011.
Africa’s redemption cometh. It is in the wind, it is coming. One day, like a storm it will be here.
When that day comes, all Africa will stand together."

The final section of the museum focuses on the cultural practices of Ghanaians in the Central Region beginning with an overview of the region’s people, practices, domestic economy, agricultural products, fishing, and chieftaincy system. The museum narrative begins with pre-European African culture and continues through European control. It ends by highlighting the fact that Africa, in this case Ghana, is independent and the culture has survived. But why place the culture inside the Cape Coast Slave Castle? There is a Cultural Center five minutes from the Cape Coast Slave Castle that would be able to house this exhibit in a more applicable setting. By placing it in the actual structure of Cape Coast Slave Castle, Fante culture is inextricably linked in the minds of all visitors, Ghanaian and foreign, with the dark history of the place. It’s not that the culture is unaffected by slave trade, but to highlight it within the slave castle, after an exhibition on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, damages its image for all who see it. Due to the high volume of visitors to the slave castle, the GMMB decided that the education of the Fante culture would be learned most within the space of the Cape Coast Slave Castle Museum whether it was applicable there or not. It clear to see that this “monument showcases everything” – the reason why so many tourists visit.

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30 It is technically the last section of the exhibit, but due to the complete break in narrative and division in space, I have decided to consider it separate from the Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade exhibition.
31 Bordoh, Ebenezer Collins. Personal interview. 16 November. 2011.
   Interior and Exterior photographs of the Portuguese Church/Dutch Trading Hall where the exhibit is housed
32 Bordoh, Ebenezer Collins. Personal interview. 15 November. 2011.
The Elmina Slave Castle Museum’s exhibit entitled *Images of Elmina across the centuries* reintroduces the concept of the exhibition of culture within a site of trauma and offers quite the collection of photographs. It is divided into six different sections beginning with “Environment” which offers a background on the physical environment of the fishing village including the Kakum and Benya Streams, the lagoon, the three hills, and soil type. The exhibit continues to “People, Neighbours and Culture” which highlights the local people, the Edina, and their cultural practices. It emphasizes that the culture has survived even under heavy European influence. This display also includes several photographs of durbars and queen mothers along with a list of the Kings of Edina and a wooden royal stool. Economic activities consisting of fishing, salt production, and tourism as well as an overview of pre-European practices of pottery, metal work, and wood carving are discussed and put on display. The Bakatue and Nsagu Afe Festivals’, paired with a brief description of traditional religion, histories are explained as well as modern day descriptions of both and conclude the focus on cultural practices.

The third section of the exhibit focuses on the “Trade with Europeans” beginning with an introduction to the builders of the slave castles and forts of Ghana. The trading of gold with the Portuguese led to the erection of St. George’s Castle and the city-state of Elmina was ruled by the chiefs, elders, and Portuguese governor in the early 1600s. In 1637, the Dutch captured the slave castle and continued the gold trade, but focused more on the slave trade which was established under the Portuguese and eventually abolished under the Dutch. The British then

33 *Trade with Europeans. “Images of Elmina across the centuries.” Elmina Castle Museum. P.O. Box 281. Cape Coast. 23 November 2011.*
received the slave castle in an agreement with the Dutch in the late seventeenth century. By that time the gold trade had slowed, and Elmina suffered economically from the lack of trade. Within this display, the involvement of Elmina Slave Castle in the slave trade is introduced. The slaves were sent from Elmina to the Americas and the Caribbean. Directly to the right of this very brief description of the slave trade are a set of hand shackles, combination neck and hand shackles, and a branding iron, none of which are labeled. The display continues with the narrative of the building in which the museum is housed. It was a Portuguese Roman Catholic Church that was turned into a trading hall when the Dutch took control of Elmina Slave Castle. The fact that only three sentences describe the involvement of the Elmina Slave Castle in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade throughout the exhibit is deplorable and should be corrected immediately.

The fourth section of the museum focuses on the impact of European influences highlighting education, religion, and multiracialism. Again, the influences are listed as positive aspects of European influence, similar to the Cape Coast Slave Castle Museum exhibition. The positive effects of these European influences are debatable. There was an informal system of education already in place before European contact, and the formal educational system was established for privileged Africans and European offspring and arguably furthered the slave trade. The introduction of religion in this exhibit takes a more neutral tone and simply states the different Christian sects that can be found within the area. The last element of European influence on the front of the display is multiculturalism and it is extremely odd. The description is as follows: “Elmina’s long association with Europeans has resulted in the growth of a multi-
racial community; and names such as Viala, Plange and Duncan bear witness to this." This is paired with two large pictures of light skinned Ghanaian families. Other influential factors on display are the introduction by Europeans of certain crops, including sugar cane, maize, and ginger. The final European influence is the introduction of a European judicial system which “has taken precedence because of modern development.” The prominence of a European judiciary system is actually the result of colonialization and the continuation of a European political system. A disturbing element that is also missing from the Cape Coast Slave Castle Museum is the influence of Ghana upon Europe; agricultural products, river and shallow mining, herbal medicine, and fabric printing are all examples of information given to Europe from Ghana. The inclusion of this would offer a less morphed metaphysical interpretation of the exchange of ideas.

The fifth section is about the architectural history of European buildings in Elmina including further information on Elmina Slave Castle and Fort St. Jago. The final section of the museum is entitled “The Asante at Elmina,” and it gives a comprehensive history of the Elmina-Asante-Dutch trade alliance and of Prempeh I’s imprisonment at Elmina Slave Castle. Again, the local culture is exhibited, explained, and displayed within the museum within the slave castle, muddling the slave trade narrative and the culture of the Edina. All in all, the Elmina Slave Castle’s Museum does properly address the topic of slavery and leaves that historical aspect to the tour guide. This is a dangerous thing to do because the narrative of the tours is not always

34 *European Influence.* “Images of Elmina across the centuries.” Elmina Castle Museum.
35 *European Influence* “Images of Elmina across the centuries.” Elmina Castle Museum.
36 Bordoh, Ebenezer Collins. Personal interview. 16 November. 2011.
the same; although the tour guides have a prompt, “based on what the group is, the narrative will change.”

Tours are major elements of a visitor’s experience at both slave castles. The tours are arguably the most valuable source of historical context found within the spaces. Tour guides tell the history of the building including its construction, its development into a slave trade center, and its modern uses. Both tours highlight the irony of the proximity of the European churches to the dungeons where thousands of human beings were stored. The horror stories of the female dungeon at Elmina Slave Castle and the “Door of No Return” at Cape Coast Slave Castle are two examples of how different the details of the slave castle tours are. As stated before, the tour guides are trained and given a prompt which they add to or subtract from depending on the racial composition of the group. This is not completely unexpected, but the tour guides must be careful to keep the narrative true.

*Images of Elmina across the centuries* and *Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade* offer two different narratives to tourists. Elmina Slave Castle’s *Images of Elmina across the centuries* focuses on the history of Elmina and how Europeans affected its economy, culture, and architectural style. Cape Coast Slave Castle’s *Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade* focuses on the connections between Africans and African Americans in addition to the prominence of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade narrative.

A museum within a site of trauma should be able to put the place or structure into historical context for its visitors and Elmina’s exhibit hardly does this while Cape Coast’s makes a valiant effort. The problematic issue for both museums lies within the voice of donors in the

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37 Bordoh, Ebenezer Collins. Personal interview. 15 November. 2011.
museum narrative. “The explicit intention of many... managers and interpreters of sites and museums of atrocity heritage is frequently and openly expressed to be didactic,”38 but the body in charge of the narrative, in this case the donor, controls what is viewed as historically accurate. The presence and influence of Europeans in the slave trade is represented in *Crossroads*, but it is quick to shoulder the burden of guilt with Africans; while *Images*, merely mentions the fact that the European trade had anything to do with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The lack of incriminating letters and literature of European views of Africans are two other historical factors that are not mentioned in either museum narrative. In addition to what is excluded, the imposition of an African American narrative and the inclusion of the “positives” of European influence also demonstrate that the narrative of the museums belong to their donors. “Memory is constructed through processes of selecting, repeating, forgetting – willfully as well as unconsciously – and re-assembling narratives,”39 and those who assemble the narratives are directly responsible for the state of the memory.

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38 Ashworth Do Tourist
39 Richards, “What is to Be Remembered?,”617.
The physical and metaphysical white-washing of the historic narrative of these sites exemplifies the effect that neo-colonialism has had in the trauma tourism of Ghana. The projects of conservation, the displays within the museums, and the museums themselves could not possibly exist without the generous support of the following organizations: USAID, UNESCO, the UNDP, and the Smithsonian Institute. These organizations have helped the GMB accomplish the conservation, not preservation, of Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles. The organization’s presence is palpable because conservation projects have unfortunately focused on developing the Ghanaian economy and not on the pressing issue of preserving the sites for the sake of preservation; without this, the history of these sites is perversely affected.
In a tourist driven economy, it is not surprising to see the generalization of culture for sale. It is horrifying, however, that the economy would be supported upon the sale of the Ghana’s slave trade history, and with it the histories of the slaves exported to the Americas. History being sold to the highest bidder is not history. It is a morphed story changed to be appealing to those individuals who are willing to bid for it. As mentioned before, there are multiple influences upon the conservation of the slave castles and forts; however, there is only one beneficiary of the sale of this history. The Ghanaian government is too reliant upon tourism and as a direct result, the narratives and purposes of Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castle are distorted. They serve solely as a source of revenue for the state while the unprofitable forts rot away unnoticed. In this sense, history is not only white-washed but it is also eliminated.

According to Nana Kobina Nketsia V, a former chairman of the board, the GMMB was established by Kwame Nkrumah. After his overthrow, a new decree declared that the internally generated funds were to be kept within the site for preservation and conservation, but because of government instability and lack of vision, the concept of a museum within Ghana was lost. Not much attention was paid to the slave castles and forts within Ghana, but then foreign embassies and outside bodies began to establish the importance of maintaining the sites. When UNESCO established the slave castles and forts as World Heritage sites, major conservation began. USAID “renovated and restored” Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles and rules were established in regards to the use of the slave dungeons as a result of the title given to the sites by UNESCO. The buildings were evaluated and equipped with museums and tour guides in
order to bolster the amount of tourists to the area. After the conservation projects were
completed, Ghana tourism quickly became “the third largest producer of foreign exchange.”

Because of the economic developmental goals of all conservation projects, it is not
surprising that the slave castles and forts have become streams of revenue for the state. USAID
is involved in the historic restoration of the slave castles and forts because “the lack of an
integrated conservation and development plan for the Cape Coast area, that enjoys the support
of the community, can be dangerous in a time when tourism is expected to grow rapidly.”

Tourism is certainly a great source of revenue for the state and community, but it is
dangerously reliant upon external factors such as international economic stability. The
economic extortion of these sites of trauma is an economically unstable and historically
unethical plan. The Ghanaian government and the GMMB, should re-evaluate the worth of the
slave castles and forts.

They can white-wash the structure and story until it shines, but the acts of conservation
through beautification only diminish true value of the history that lies within.

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40 Richards 619
41 Elen M. Delage. *United States Committee, International Council on Monuments and Sites’ Conservation and
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Books


Conferences and Conventions


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