

‘Now let me share this with you’: Exploring poetry as a method for postcolonial geography research

INTRODUCTION

Now let me share this with you—
A harvest from the fields of our protection
A harvest the kind that exonerates magisterial furs...
That they scarcely ever come to the houses without invitation
That they scarcely harass you for possessing a garden of vegetables
That they never tamper with the paintings on walls of houses
Or do they host athletic competitions on rooftops
The pandemonium asphyxiating sleep caught
To freshen up souls for another labour day...
(Gabriel Eshun, 2009)

The extract above is from a poem created by Gabriel during the process of conducting research among the Akan in Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS) in Ghana. The poem illustrates Akan community views regarding the monkeys that are found in the Sanctuary. These monkeys are revered and protected by the Akan within this Sanctuary, being allowed to freely enter people’s houses and to browse vegetable gardens, for the monkeys are generally thought to be an important component of the community. This poem is used as an exemplar for the central question underlying this paper: can poetry be a useful *method* in the process of creating postcolonial geography research? In particular, our contention is to explore whether poetry might be a means of re-representing and interpreting data collected through in-depth qualitative interviews among rural Akan communities, given the significance of oratory within Akan cosmology. This claim must be explored carefully, for while there are no simplistic African/non-African, non-western/western, indigenous/colonial, oral/scriptural divides, we *do* want to assert the possibility and importance of exploring new research tools that might ‘create more cosmopolitan theoretical projects’ (Jazeel 2007: 287) within the discipline of geography¹.

This move is important for although postcolonial perspectives are now firmly on the agenda in geography (McEwan 2009; Sharp 2008), according to Gilmartin and Berg (2007: 123) ‘British postcolonial geography is dominated by critiques of the discursive construction of historical colonialism’ rather than on the ‘the aftermath and continuation of colonialism’. As a consequence, we think there is a need for postcolonial geography research to more clearly

uncover the ‘ongoing and more intimate colonialisms that might be more directly challenging to the everyday practices and epistemologies of present-day geographers themselves’ (Noxolo 2009: 56). In particular, there still remains only a limited corpus of work which makes a postcolonial analysis of the everyday practices of contemporary geographical research, specifically in terms of a postcolonial method. Thus according to Raghuram and Madge (2006: 270, italics in the original):

‘Despite a great deal of work theorising postcolonial positions, we still lack a thorough and detailed discussion about what a postcolonial *method* might look like, the issues we should consider while deploying such a method, what problems might arise, and how these might be overcome. In particular, how can the ‘colonial present’ of one contemporary practice of imperialism- that of why, how and what we research- be decentred and relocated to make development research more postcolonial?’

To date, there have only been a few works that chart the contours of a postcolonial method. This has been done with respect to HIV/AIDS research in Botswana (Chilisa 2005), water privatisation in Ghana (Yeboah 2006), international business management (Jack and Westwood 2010) and the politics of reconciliation (McGonegal 2004). However, much more still remains to be done.

From the outset it is important to state that any attempt to develop any postcolonial method is a multifaceted, intricate and potentially contested process that will be set within the parameters of continuing imperial global capital, routed in the specificities of the historical and spatial production of inequalities in particular places, and attuned to confront such existing hierarchies through on-going dialogue with communities located in these places. This paper is therefore specifically ‘located’ in the example of ecotourism research conducted in Boabeng and Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS) in Ghana and our arguments are based prominently on the Akan group. This sets our particular framing and emphasis in relation to a postcolonial method but what we are emphatically *not* arguing is that our contentions about the Akan and orality are attuned *only* to some pristine and romantic non-western space in Ghana because oral traditions also abound in many other locations and spaces, including the UK. But what we *are* exploring is the possibility of ever escaping a so-called ‘Eurocentric world-picturing’ (Sidaway 2000: 606) by recognising the situated and specific knowledges (Butz 2011: 46) and conceptual landscapes of those communities living in the Boabeng and Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS). As Briggs and Sharpe (2004: 664) have argued, in most research ‘[T]he experiences of the marginalised are used in the West,

but without opening up the process to their knowledges, theories and explanations.’ We therefore wanted to explore an approach to knowledge creation that was potentially both relevant to, and appropriate for, the community upon which this research is based. This moved us towards an exploration of poetry as a research method.

Barnes and Duncan (1992: 1) some time ago noted the general lack of attention paid to writing in geography, despite the Greek roots of ‘geo’ and ‘graphien’ meaning ‘earth writing’. As a result, we seek to contribute to this lacuna by employing poetry as a method of ‘earth writing’ used to re-represent and interpret qualitative data collected from different community members at BFMS. In rural Ghana (and many other places too), oral culture remains a significant feature of lifeworlds, with common everyday usage of poems, proverbs and folktales. We therefore wished to explore the potential of poetry as a means to speak with, write about and speak back to the community with whom we were working (Ashcroft et al 1995). We wanted to discover whether poetry might be a research tool to counter the claim that: ‘Africa’s truth has always been at the mercy of the fiction of others’ (Niyi Osundare, a Nigerian poet, quoted by Patke 2006b: 11). Could poetry be used as a method to decentre what is conventionally called ‘western’ ways of knowing and to provincialise Euro-American epistemologies (Chakrabarty: 2000)? Might poetry be a way to move towards re-constituting the subject positions from which Ghanaian (specifically Akan) people could find a ‘voice’ to speak about themselves and their life experiences? This paper explores these issues and debates the problems and potentials of poetry as a postcolonial research method.

The rest of the article is structured into five sections. The first section explores the complex and ambivalent relationship between poetry and (post)colonialism, specifically situating African poetry, whilst also highlighting the dearth of literature surrounding poetry as *method* in postcolonial research. To counter this research gap, the second section focuses on the pragmatics of poetry as a research method. Section three explores a case study of the use of poetry as a method for ecotourism research among the Akan of Boabeng and Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS) in Ghana. Drawing on this case study, section four then critically explores some of the potentials and limitations of using poetry. The final section five serves as the conclusion and draws together some reflections on postcolonial method, poetry and postcolonial geography research. We make a call for greater creativity in this endeavour to produce enlivening, accountable and enduring postcolonial geographies.

PLACING POETRY AND THE (POST)COLONIALⁱⁱ

According to Nwachukwu-Agbada (1994), oral poetry is about the oldest literary genre in Africa while the written tradition of poetry is a comparatively recent experience, encouraged by western education and contact. The written word as a key technology of power is undisputed, particularly so during the period of European colonialism in Africa. Although many authors have explored the role of language, fiction and drama in this process of intervention (Gikandi 2003; Okolo 2007; Owomoyela 1993), less has been written about poetryⁱⁱⁱ. However, various poetic forms were utilised in various times and places in Africa both as a form of resistance to colonial power and as a language form that was deeply implicated in the colonial process. Consequently poetry was both a means by which people were indoctrinated and assimilated into the colonial mindset but could also be a means by which to resist dominant colonial practices. Poetic forms at times also reflected a hybrid intermixing of colonial and African styles while at other times more ‘undiluted’ African and colonial styles ran side by side. Below we discuss these complex relationships of assimilation, resistance, hybridity and duality.

Regarding *assimilation*, the politics of the colonial language as a ‘forced tongue’ mediated by the history of slavery, racism and repression is clear. Deep-rooted perceptions of the inferiority of Africans were routed in and through colonial education systems. Chilisa (2005), for example, notes that George Hardy (who was the Inspector General for Education in French West Africa in the 1890s) recorded that ‘any curriculum that emphasized abstract knowledge was too complicated for Africans to grasp, was a waste of time and worse still, might cause major problems’ (quoted in Chilisa 2005: 606). These racist spatial geometries of power also involved the insertion of the metropolitan language (English, French, and German etc) into many African colonies: thus Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (1987: 12) treatise on how the English language ‘colonised the mind’ is quite clear from quote below:

‘In primary school I now read simplified Dickens and Stevenson alongside Rider Haggard. Jim Hawkins, Oliver Twist, Tom Brown - not Hare, Leopard and Lion - were now my daily companions in the world of imagination..... At Makerere I read English: from Chaucer to T. S. Eliot with a touch of Graham Greene. Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.’

In so doing, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1995: 287) observes that the English language came to occupy an 'unassailable position' in African literature, which is forcefully captured in the poem below by Malawi's Felix Mnthali (1982) entitled 'The Stranglehold of English Literature':

Eng. Lit., my sister,
Was more than a cruel joke -
it was the heart
of alien conquest.

How could questions be asked
at Makerere and Ibadan,
Dakar and Fort Hare -
with Jane Austen
at the centre?
How could they be answered?
(quoted in Moore and Beier 1984: 139).

This insertion of the English language was promoted through the support of various agencies (such as the missionary presses, the BBC, the European publishing industry and later the post-independent Ministries of Education) who promulgated speaking, hearing and writing English in the British (and beyond) colonies (Barnett 2006). Many early African poets that became known (and promoted) on the international arena were often those who were members of a new educated elite who utilised the English language, had often been trained in the 'motherland' and mimicked a sometimes obscure European uncritical modernist style (Garba 2005). However, at the same time, these poets (and others) also began a struggle to wrench this same language free from the politics of colonialism.

Poetry in some places thus developed into a means by which some African people could appropriate the colonizer's language and act out some *resistance* to the European encounter. Patke (2006b), for example, explores how experimentation with language in the poetic form became a form of resistance and a mode for reshaping cultural selfhood for those who had been 'displaced or marginalized on the grounds of their cultural, civilizational, or, as it is often described, moral and spiritual backwardness' (Patke 2006b: 8, quoting Bhabha 2000: 370). So some poetic forms attempted to both imaginatively deal with the history of loss under colonial rule, but also initiated moves towards liberation and dependence via anti-colonial poetry. This was particularly so in the period leading up to independence and according to Nwachukwu-Agbada (1994), the forms that poetry took in promulgating this process were regionally varied. In East Africa, he suggests that poetry was concerned with

the contact between Africa and Europe and what it had meant for the personality of the East African. The colonial past and the anger it invoked is brought alive by Kenyan Joseph Kareyaku:

It is not as you suppose, your lands,
your cars, your money, or your cities
I covet...
It is what gores me most,
that in my own house and in my very own home
you should eye me and all that's mine
with that practiced, long-drawn, insulting sneer

(quoted in Iyengar 1968: 30).

By contrast, according to Nwachukwu-Agbada (1994), in West Africa poetry as resistance reflected an assertion of cultural identity, best represented by the *négritude* movement. The poet and eventual President of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, published the first anthology of French-language poetry written by Africans in 1948, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (*Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in the French Language*). In South Africa, the focus was on active protest against the human degradation of racial segregation, which was initiated in colonial times and enforced during apartheid. Patke's (2006b) discussion of English poetry from South Africa is an example of how poetry was used as a form of protest against the silencing of opinion and democracy. This transformative effect of poetry was often precisely so effective because of the ability of poetry to speak to the physical and physiological anguish and pain of the colonial/apartheid experience, as highlighted in the poem by Dennis Brutus below (he was imprisoned in Robben Island by the apartheid regime):

The not-knowing
is perhaps the worst part of the agony
for those outside;

not knowing what cruelties must be endured
what indignities the sensitive spirit must face
what wounds the mind can be made to inflict on itself;
(quoted in Garba 2005: 462).

So the relationship between poetry and the colonial encounter was not singular, undifferentiated or clear-cut. Not only were there regional differences but the dynamic intermixing of African/European poetic styles also produced *hybrid* poetic subjects and

forms, further complicating the picture. This cultural intermixing is well articulated by Nigerian Gabriel Okara:

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing...

[T]hen I hear a wailing piano
Solo speaking of complex ways

(quoted in Gleason 1965: 143).

Moreover, Ramazani (2001: 1) proposes that although ‘the story of the globalization of English-language poetry remains largely untold’, there is a rich and vibrant poetic tradition resulting from the fusion and hybridization of African and English muses which occurred particularly during the post-independent period by poets located in the diaspora. As Ashcroft et al (1995) identify, postcolonial writing is dialectic and has circulating effects, transforming not only the imitator and but also the imitated. Ramazani (2001) therefore suggests that the contours of English-speaking poetry have been irrevocably expanded and the English language remade by the contributions from indigenous metaphors, rhythms, creoles and genres: ‘postcolonial poets indigenize the Western and anglicize the native to create exciting new possibilities’ (Ramazani 2001: 2)^{iv}. So as Walcott asserts ‘The English language is nobody’s special property’: there is the ability to ‘stretch’ English beyond its spatial confines of ‘Englishness’ through the poetic encounter (c.f. Ramazani 2001: 14, 17). Thus Patke (2006b: 4) concisely states ‘postcolonial poetry shows an awareness of what it means to write from a place and in a language shaped by colonial history, at a time that is not yet free from the force of that shaping.’ This shaping is highlighted in John Agard’s poem ‘Listen Mr Oxford Don’:

I ent have no gun
I ent have no knife
but mugging de Queen’s English
is the story of my life
(quoted in Petersen and Rutherford 1988: 134).

Thus African poetry in English has varyingly been a reflection of, a form of resistance to, and a hybrid passage between oral practices and imported literary forms, played out in different places at varying historical periods, while also holding in tension that more absolute forms of indigenous and colonial poetry also simultaneously existed in a *dualistic*

relationship. We must not assume, for instance, that so-called colonial ‘literate cultures’ were all-powerful and smoothly and fully replaced their oral counterparts; indeed print culture was often restricted to only a small elite proportion of the total population (Barnett 2006: 8). So much indigenous orature remains (although constantly evolving) to this day, including folk-stories, proverbs, praise singers and oral poetry. Before scriptural literature took over, oral poetry expressed by communal poets, poet-singers and performers was the norm throughout Africa^v, which is poetry that calls out to be heard and it is based on the spoken word, the vernacular, and the speech of the people (Hoyles and Hoyles 2002). Among the Akan, for example, poetry is called *awinsem* meaning ‘weaved message’. Poetry in Akan falls into drum poetry (such as the ‘talking drum’ the *atumpān*), funeral dirges and libation poetry (Abarry 1994). Drum poetry is performed at funerals to praise rulers, to record history and to express proverbs and is more evident during ceremonial gatherings such as festivals and funerals. Asante women champion the funeral dirges especially on funerals grounds where their ingenuity of abstraction captures the occasion. Libation poetry is usually concerned with request making or thanksgiving, and often implicates a supreme being. Oral poetry thus has a long history of usage among the Akan, which continues to the present day, for example being used in the Jubilee Celebrations of Ghana’s Independence in 2007^{vi}.

While the discussion above illustrates that when considering poetry as *subject*, there are a myriad of dialectical relationships between poetry, colonial history and postcolonial sensibilities, transversing ‘between assimilation and resistance to colonial culture, between being shaped by and giving new shape to the colonial language, between the will to community and the will to modernity in an era of asynchronous decolonization’ (Patke 2006b: 4), much less has been written about the complexities of poetry as *method* for postcolonial research. This is perhaps surprising given that poetry is a genre that is rich in paradox, symbolism and metaphor and therefore well placed to mediate the intricacies and complexities of the postcolonial experience. Sylvester (2006), for example, advocates use of poetry (among other creative forms) to ‘access, understand and learn from the lived experiences and subjectivities of people in the South’ (McEwan 2009: 269), while Ashcroft (2001: 30-31) suggests such narrative forms can be important in the politics of transformation, enabling a ‘re-inscribing of place to produce a regional, or localized, worldview’ as a counterpoint to ‘the emptying out of local space by colonialism and neo-imperialism’ (quoted in McEwan 2009: 269). In this paper we grapple with the difficulties

that might be involved, and the transformative potentialities implicated, in employing poetry as a method to conduct research in rural Ghana. We expand on the practicalities of how this might be achieved below.

POETRY AS A RESEARCH METHOD

Poetry is gaining some attention as a methodological tool among qualitative researchers working in an Anglo-American context. Here poetry has been used both as a method of inquiry and a means of data collection (Furman et al 2010). Indeed, recent moves in the performative social sciences have led to the exploration of poetry for the co-production of knowledge (Doornbos et al 2008), for exploring the possibility of multiple voices through collective dialogue (MacKenzie 2008), for more empathetic, flexible and interdisciplinary research strategies (Rapport 2008; Wiebe 2008) and to chart the intersubjectivity, reflexivity, and positionality of the research process itself (Chawla 2008; Furman et al 2010). Despite this literature, there remains a lack of work which positions poetry as a research method in relation to postcolonial research. Below we consider how this might be done for while it is not a preoccupation of this article to delve into the techniques of creating poems, Cahnmann (2003: 30) has cautioned ‘if poetry is to have a greater impact on research, those engaged in poetic practices need to share their processes and products to the entire research community, and the terms of its use must be clearly defined.’ Responding to Cahnmann’s (2003) plea, we therefore lay out our parameters of practice that we have developed in utilising poetry for research purposes. This builds on some key work by Furman et al (2006; 2010), Langer and Furman (2004), Richardson (1994) and Sherry and Schoulten (2002).

Our deployment of poetry is specifically for the purpose of re-representing and interpreting data collected through in-depth qualitative interviews. In so doing, we follow (but embellish) Langer and Furman’s (2004) suggestion of the use of ‘research’ and ‘interpretive’ poems in research analysis^{vii}. A description of how these poems might be created is elaborated below. First, an in-depth interview is conducted and the text is transcribed. From this text, a ‘research poem’ is created, which utilises key phrases from the transcribed data. Personal observations, photos and videos also help to capture the respondents’ gestures and thus aid in contextualising the emotive aspect of the poem. The created poem is thus a condensed version of the respondents’ words and is a means of data reduction that re-represents data for the purposes of research. Being based on the responses

of the respondents, research poems are useful when the researcher seeks to directly present the ‘voice’ of the researched as the primary transmitter of data in compressed form.

However, this adherence to presenting the interviewees’ ‘voice’ limits a researcher’s ‘additions’ or interpretations of an event or situation. Thus a second poem may be created which is an ‘interpretive poem’ which involves the researcher creating a poem to re-represent the respondent’s original words, emotions and actions. But the interpretive poem is not limited to the words and perspectives collected through the in-depth interview: it can also incorporate a much larger scope of analysis, including various perspectives on a topic (the researcher’s, global institutions, local authority figures, secondary data etc as well as that of the interview respondent). With the interpretive poem, the researcher can present themselves in the research with their subjectivities, politics, emotions and ethics, among other subjects, to ‘open up’ the poem. Thus rather than having a compressed form, the interpretive poem has a generative form that extends interpretation and analysis of a situation from a multitude of perspectives.

Generally speaking, both types of poem should not simply be conceived of as ‘writing up’ research (i.e. a mechanistic format akin to a plot summary) but as a creative production of research, an open strategy of discovery enacted through intuition that does not cease on data generation and leads to producing an holistic work cohering at multiple levels of meaning (Richardson 2000: 925). In this sense, poems are not used as objective or generalisable data, but as in-depth data in exploring complex relationships (Langer and Furman 2004) but if a poem shows some truth with the research population that poem is transferable by its own merit (Sherry and Schouten 2002). And this concurs with the assertion that poetry can make ‘the interior life of one individual available to others...in symbolism and imagery that is differently accessible’ (Dove 1994: 25).

It was a shared belief in this transformative potential of poetry that originally stimulated the research approach upon which this paper rests. Gabriel has recently graduated as a PhD student, originating from Ghana, and Clare was Gabriel’s doctoral supervisor for his research. Although we are clearly very differently ‘located’ in terms of position in the global academy, social location, life experiences etc, we share commonalities in our political visions, intellectual viewpoints and joy of creativity. Supervision sessions fostered an ongoing dialogue about these differences and commonalities, often reverberating around

postcolonialism, poetry (we have both written it for some time) and methodologies/epistemologies. Thus the original idea to use poetry as a research method arose through this supervision dialogue and a mutual respect for the ‘freshness’ of language and perspective that a good poem can create. The poems in this paper were created by Gabriel after conducting in-depth interviews at BFMS as part of his PhD thesis on ‘Ecotourism Development in Ghana: postcolonial perspectives.’ Once created, the original poems were presented to the interviewees by Gabriel. Out of mutual interest, all the lines of each poem were delved into and further suggestions from the interviewees were appropriately incorporated into the final version of the poems. Through this process, an ‘analytical pruning’ was achieved which ensured that the analysis presented in the poems sought to stay *with* the voice of the communities, while at the same time ensuring the aims of the research were well-answered.

In this section we have generally outlined the way in which poetry might be used as a research method. In the next section we give a concrete example of how this was done through a case study of ecotourism research in Boabeng and Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS) in Ghana. First we place the research project in its broader international and national context, and then give two examples of how poetry might be used as a tool for postcolonial ecotourism research.

USING POETRY AT BOABENG AND FIEMA

LOCATING THE RESEARCH

Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to initiate a structural adjustment policy (SAP) in 1983 and is recently claimed to be the first African nation that will half poverty by 2015, with economic growth predicted to reach over ten percent in 2011 (Franklin 2010). The government established a Ministry of Tourism in 1993 to underscore its commitment to tourism development and with financial and technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), produced a 15-year Integrated Tourism Development Programme (1996-2010). This plan projected that Ghana’s tourism would earn US\$1.6 billion from over 1 million tourist visitors by 2010 (Akyeampong and Asiedu 2008). In 2001, the ‘Noguchi statement’ was created with the joint aims of achieving macro-economic stability, rapid economic growth and significant poverty reduction concurrently (Aryeetey and Kanbur 2004). The poverty reduction facet to this broadly economic aspiration is where ecotourism is inserted into the policy frame since

Ghana's tourism policy is strongly informed by the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2006-2009 (GPRS II), which among other objectives seeks to effectively manage and conserve the cultural, environmental and historical resources of Ghana, balancing economic utilisation with sensitivity and conservation (EPA 2008).

Generally, ethnic groups in Ghana fall into two regional categories: the southern Akan, Ga-Adangbe and Ewe, who speak the Kwa languages; and the northern part of the country which consists of Gur speakers (Pellow and Chazan 1986). The Akan group account for over 44 percent of Ghana's population and they are made up of (in alphabetical order) the Ahanta, Asante, Assin, Akyim, Bono, Fante, Kwahu, Nzima and Wassa. This research focuses on this Akan group and, as with many other groups, gods are important in Akan cosmology. In most Akan societies it is understood that *Tumi* (the supernatural powers) and *Onyame* (the Supreme Creator Deity-God) are imbued within inanimate resources such as rocks, rivers, springs and stones and animate resources like forests, trees and animals, (Sarfo-Mensah and Oduro 2007). The *Tumi* imputes 'spirit' or *sunsum* into natural resources, and is also associated with the belief in a 'life force' or *sasa* in plants and animals equivalent to the *kra* or soul in humans. For instance, trees such as *odum* (*Chlorophora excelsa*), African mahogany (*Khaya ivorensis*) and *osese* (*Funtumia sp.*) are regarded as housing spirits and are not usually felled without rituals. The role of gods such as *Abujo* and *Daworo* in rebuking the killing of animal species, such as monkeys, still remains formidable in Akan cosmology despite Christianity and Islam gaining some importance in reorienting the psyche of people and their relationship to their environment. Consequently, gods are very much associated with environmental beliefs in the Akan case, acting as a bridge between the natural and human world.

This research discusses the Akan in Boabeng and Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS) which is located over 230 kilometres from the capital Accra, in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. BFMS is touted as a community-based ecotourism initiative and remains a celebrated example of 'indigenous' African Conservation. The Sanctuary is nestled in between the two villages of Boabeng and Fiema. The sanctuary is home to 200 black and white Colobus (*Colobus vellerosus* known locally as *Afoo*) and 500 Mona monkeys (*Cercopithecus campbelli lowei* known locally as *Kwakuo*). For more than 150 years the residents of these two villages have generally considered the monkeys as sacred, thus BFMS remains the only place in Africa where visitors can view these monkey species in great numbers.

The research project focused on the perspectives of residents living in and around BFMS, since their values and knowledges of their environment are often sidelined in ecotourism policy in the country. This is despite the decentralisation program pontificated by the World Bank, which aims for ‘good governance’, with the aim to include voices of local communities about their environments. As a consequence, the Environmental Protection Agency of the Ministry of Environment has developed District Environmental Management Committees but approaches of these committees still tend to be top-down and lack coordination between the activities of relevant entities such as the Ghana Tourism Board and the Ghana’s Wildlife Division. Lack of capital is often cited as the cause of such top-down approaches but the result is that local perceptions of the environment are rarely heard on national and international agendas. Thus the challenge is to expand ecotourism research to identify and to encompass topic areas that are of actual concern for the communities of eco-tourism destinations (Ateljevic et al 2009; Weaver and Lawton 2007). We want to explore whether using poetry as a research method might be a means to move towards this goal. Below we give two examples of the use of research and interpretive poetry in ecotourism research. We first examine community perceptions of monkey conservation at BFMS and, secondly, of children as eco-tourists.

COMMUNITY BELIEFS ABOUT MONKEY CONSERVATION

There are various competing community beliefs about monkey conservation at BFMS. According to the residents of Boabeng, the gods *Daworo* and *Abujo* made the taboo forbidding the killing of the black and white Colobus and the Mona monkeys. This taboo came about in the following manner. The Paramount Chief of Nkoranza (the Nkoranzahene) had a son called Kwaku Damoah, who was a chief warrior. Damoah travelled north from Nkoranza, accompanied by his patron god *Daworo*. After several days Damoah came to a dried up river bed where he later settled and named as Asarekoma; there he observed a piece of white calico being guarded by two black and white Colobus monkeys and two Mona monkeys. Damoah consulted on this unusual sight and was told that the monkeys would bring good fortune to his descendants, and that one day people, including Caucasians, would be visiting the local villages but this would only be the case if the community cared for the monkeys. Such beliefs have filtered through to the present day and the monkeys are still held in very high regard in Boabeng, to the extent that they are buried in a graveyard when they die. They are now considered to be an important part of the

community and there is a widespread belief that should the villagers move to another settlement, the monkeys would follow suit (Saj et al 2006).

However, there are several competing versions vying against this general belief regarding the sacred nature of the monkeys. For example, the fetish priest of Fiema holds trenchantly that it was the settlement of their ancestors Fobiri and Donsah that ensured that the monkeys were not killed because the god *Abujo* abhorred the sight of blood, and thus he forbade killing of the monkeys^{viii}. Another story suggests that the Nkoranzahene killed some of the monkeys and also some members of Asarekoma, which caused the villagers to discharge capital punishment on this royal personage. Subsequently, people of Asarekoma became known as '*Bo aben*', which in Akan means 'brave people'. In more recent times, some members of Fiema no longer felt bound by the taboo regarding the sanctity of the monkeys. Although very irregular, it was not unknown for monkeys to be killed here. For instance, the members of the Saviour Church in the 1970s killed some of the monkeys. This situation of changing beliefs about protecting the monkeys gave rise to the initiative from the Ghana Wildlife Division to enact a local byelaw which originally created the Sanctuary for the monkeys in 1975.

In order to capture these competing community beliefs about monkeys, formal in-depth interviews were conducted with the current fetish priest of Boabeng, the son of the late fetish priest of Boabeng, the Chief and his elders at Boabeng and the fetish priest from Fiema. It is well known that such authority figures as chiefs, community elders and fetish priests are 'living libraries' in Akan communities and they hold vast repertoires of local oral histories^{ix}. For instance, before a chief is enthroned, he must learn a detailed chronology of the history of the place under his authority. A fetish priest is also seen as the rightful traditional overseer of the welfare of the environment, including monkeys, which places him in an inexorable position to possess in-depth information about these animals that ordinary members of the community might not have. In one interview, the son of the late fetish priest kept saying, 'I remember my father telling me...' and this became a useful repetition in the subsequent created research poem, which in essence is a condensed version of the interviews. What is interesting in this research poem below is that it carries multiple voices about the differing and competing perceptions of the importance of monkeys to the people of Boabeng and Fiema.

Research Poem: The Oracle Message

And I remember my father telling me
About Damoah who beheld a piece of white calico
Guarded by two black and white Colobus
And two Mona monkeys
And that the monkeys are a kismet

And I remember my father telling me
About a Nkoranzahene
Who made the taboo on killing of the monkeys
Who combed through Asarekoma shooting monkeys—
Shooting people he mistook for monkeys
Shooting people in treetops picking fruits...
And how that forced our iron to stop a bloody Royal

And I remember my father telling me
About our siblings in the northward settlement—
About Fobiri and Donsah from the royal family of Kokofu
About their close blood portion
That put them under custody of a Nkoranzahene
That the Nkoranzahene told them to take along the god Abujo
And how the spread of their seeds positioned them as Fiema

And I remember my father telling me
That our siblings at Fiema
Concur the monkeys came into the forests on their settlement
Because Abujo abhors blood

And I remember my father telling me
That Daworo and Abujo are the gods of the monkeys
That Daworo is a female god and Abujo is a male god
That they've fallen in love
That on a full stop to breathing of a monkey
Ceremonial burial must be bestowed—

And I remember the early 1970s
The emergence of Satellite communities...
And how the congregation of the Saviour Church
Scoffed at the furry taboo and killed monkeys—
And how the elders of Boabeng summoned my father...
They said he has given ancestral land to monkeys

And I remember my father Gesturing at a White visitor and telling me,
Son, when White people visit in numbers then know
We've cared well for the children of the gods: the Oracle Message
(Gabriel Eshun, 2009)

In creating research poems based on varying views of different community members, the research poem has the potential to convey the inevitable contestations (and agreements)

between different social actors about a specific ecotourism issue. The research poem is therefore potentially a useful device through which it is possible for a wide variety of voices to enter the frame and thus move towards a reorientation of the centre from which that specific ecotourism issue might be articulated. However, what the research poem does not allow is the wider analysis of an event or situation and it is here that the interpretive poem can help.

Below, an interpretive poem has been created about monkey conservation in BFMS. In this poem the ‘kitted tongues’ portrays how the voices of residents of Boabeng and Fiema about the history of the monkeys are interwoven with other perspectives such as that of the Ghana Wildlife Division, Researchers (Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians), NGOs such as the Nature Conservation Research Centre and the church- the ‘Gethsemane Way’. However, there are some differences between these competing versions of relationships with monkeys, hence the line their voices weaved ‘as simulacrum of the zeitgeist of a yesterday’ which is able to resist adulterations in representations ‘like a termitarium in a landscape of grass’. Moreover, BFMS can blow its ‘...name through pathways of trumpets’ because it possesses a laudable record that ‘soars fivefold over lustrum’ of protecting monkeys from onslaught. However, the ‘handshakes of akwaaba’ refers to the people seeking concrete returns for this conservation effort, thus the lines (14-18) depict how the people of Boabeng and Fiema seek to reach ‘the acme of hill of our hope’ by maintaining unwavering efforts that move beyond the physiological needs of the Maslow pyramid. In the research poem ‘the Oracle Message’ the monkeys are positioned as a ‘kismet’ to the local communities only if they care for the monkeys. However, in the interpretive poem ‘A Trumpet through the Oracle message’, the poem maintains that for the monkeys to be ‘fortune’ for the residents, there is a need to move beyond the mere zeal of protecting the monkeys for people distant (Europeans etc) and near (other Ghanaians etc). Indeed, the special potential of BFMS to provide revenue, employment and enduring livelihoods must come into the equation of monkey conservation. Put differently, the residents’ ‘burden’ of protecting the monkeys must be given a broader consideration to gain a ‘fair share’ in the ecotourism venture.

Interpretive Poem: A Trumpet through the Oracle Message

We weave our tongues with yarns of voices distant and near—
Our voices like simulacrum of the zeitgeist of a yesterday
Standing sanguinely like a termitarium in a landscape of grass
That weathers the downpours from aberrant clouds in our skies.

And our sisterhood rippling with fusillade of Nilotic longevity—
 But the arcane fontomfrom of the conjugal deities stays out
 Of pari passu with the stentorian tomtom of the Gethsemane Way—
 The byelaw producing police to the fur flagship out of necessity;
 Trenchantly our epitome of a record soars fivefold over lustrum—
 So we blow our appellations through pathways of trumpets
 The calabashfuls of anecdotes of eulogies poured onto our name
 On our inheritance through the hearts of our present-future tones
 The vigoroso for sake of actualising the acme of hill of our hope—
 Oh our handshakes of akwaaba rummaging through seasons
 Yet pristine like photos of the physiognomies of Dipo pilgrims
 On our inheritance through the hearts of our present-future tones
 Our inexorable throb to hasten our feet on our ladders of Maslow
 And our suns resplendent far beyond bouquet of White roses
 We weave our tongues with yarns of voices distant and near—
 Our voices like simulacrum of the zeitgeist of a yesterday
 Standing sanguinely like a termitarium in a landscape of grass
 (Gabriel Eshun, 2009)

In the research poem 'Oracle Message', the multi-voices of the community were recorded in the poem, however, what was missing from that poem was the 'bigger picture'. In the interpretive poem 'A Trumpet through the Oracle Message', the voice of the research community is not only projected but the aim is to also broaden the frame of analysis, taking on board wider historical and geographical perspectives. For instance, the interpretive poem is more overt in bringing out the importance of monkey conservation to bring palpable returns to the communities around BFMS, set within a wider global context. The interpretive poem draws from multiple sources and therefore opens up the process of research for greater inclusions of diverse viewpoints: by allowing for the creativity of the researcher-poet, the poem is able to reverberate beyond identified persons or groups and potentially move 'outwards'. This is a special feature of interpretive poems because it allows the poet to build on the shortfalls of research poem by being analytically more expansive with respect to ideas and politics which ensures particularistic and idiographic research is grounded in its broader implications. In addition, in this case, the broader implications are not limited to the researcher-poet alone, since the poems once created were performed to the local communities who then made further interpretive additions. Thus the interpretive poem has within it 'a seed of renewal' that can bring to the fore issues embedded in creativity in ways that research poem may not reveal. These interpretive poems therefore have the ability to open up meaning, to be creatively imaginative, and in this process can add a political and ethical twist that may be lacking in research poems. Hopefully, the two poems above give a flavour of how the research and interpretive poem might be used as a research tool which is

ethically and politically positioned within the aspirations of the research community. Below we explore a second example.

SCHOOL CHILDREN AS ECO-TOURISTS

Children's perspectives with respect to the environment and ecotourism initiatives are vital since they are the environmental custodians of the future. This is even more significant given that the visitorship of school children to eco-destinations in Ghana is at the core of the domestic market of eco-business here. For example, Honey has recorded (1999: 22) that 'ecotourism as a niche is touted to help educate members of the surrounding communities, schoolchildren, and the broader public in the host communities.' Thus, in addition to aiding local communities, one of the attributes of ecotourism is to also contribute to ecotourists learning about the places and people they visit and making these tourists more sensitive to potential impacts of their behaviours on the environment. This significance of school children as eco-tourists is explored in the example below.

During Gabriel's first stroll through the streets of Fiema, whilst enjoying the scenery of the village, a bus carrying school children on excursion to BFMS drove onto the main street of the village, and one of the pupils threw an empty can of Coca Cola onto the street. A youth of Fiema became furious and started shouting at the fast moving bus. The researcher approached the youth and conducted an informal interview with him about his views on the behaviour of ecotourist school children visiting BFMS. From the informal interview a research poem was created which, while focusing on the sole voice of the interviewee, also encapsulated a communal stance: For instance, the line 'bare questions than answers...' brings to the fore a communal concern about ecotourist visitors' negative impacts on the environment. Although Fennell (1999) has stressed that the aim of environmental education is to lead all concerned stakeholders into positive transformation in behaviours and practices at eco sites, this is clearly not always the case in practice, as the two poems below highlight.

Research Poem: You are my witness

Whereas I love to see buses bringing
School people to the Sanctuary: but
Some of the activities of the
School people produce bare questions than answers—
The School people sometimes say things to stretch
The catapult of your patience to shoot—
Sometimes rubbish is thrown into the streets...

You are my witness.

So whereas I love to see buses bringing...
But some of the activities they bring leave us with
Biting questions than answers—
(Gabriel Eshun, 2009)

In the interpretive poem below, which was constructed to broaden out the views of the young man, the emotion displayed by the youth was also conveyed in the poem through gestures of outrage and questioning. Several Akan words were used to create a poem that has resonance and relevance to the research community. For instance, the *odwen* is a tree and it is often planted in the centres of Akan villages, where they eventually provide shade for gathering of the elders. The *odwen* tree is often the site where children and youth are reprimanded by their elders, hence the ‘Dire need for joining us under an odwen tree’ to learn some good behaviour towards the eco-destination site. Additionally, the community is not amused about visitors throwing rubbish about as if the place was a refuse dump (known in Akan as *Bola*). Rural dwellers in Ghana interpret such actions by visitors as acts of *schadenfruede*—where visitors who are often from urban areas act in a demeaning way towards their rural counterparts. However rural dwellers are not passive receivers of such behaviours and hence ‘Maybe even his hometown, There are no bulbs of electricity gracing the streets...’ suggests that most urban dwellers hail originally from villages, which may also lack the facilities available at BFMS. This voicing of Akan words and concepts in the interpretive poem is both an act of ‘writing back’ (for both Gabriel and the community); it is also a means of unpicking the complexity of different views of ecotourism within the site itself and hints at the inter- and intra-community contestations over ecotourism practices.

Interpretive Poem: Coca Cola Can in our Street

How dare you throw out an empty
Can of Coca Cola in our clean street of clay—
What do you think?
This clean street of clay is a bola?
You sit in a bus on a school excursion
Your lips flaunting flowers of our lingua franca
But you’ve just shown your dire need
For joining us under an odwen tree

I’ve seen school people hurling used clothes of brands around several times
I’ve seen school people tossing eyes of schadenfruede around several times

And maybe even his hometown
There are no bulbs of electricity gracing the streets...
How dare you throw that Coca Cola can in our clean street of clay—?
(Gabriel Eshun, 2009)

However, whilst the creation of these poems is methodologically interesting, and clearly has something to add to the debate about a postcolonial method, we want to explore this argument in a more critical manner below. The next section therefore debates some of the problems and potentials of using poetry as a method for postcolonial research.

MAKING A CLAIM FOR POETRY

ENGAGING WITH EMOTIONS

One undisputed aspect and value of poetry is that it is often emotive and intuitive and can therefore ‘give language to the unsayable’ (Cahnmann 2003: 32). For a postcolonial researcher poems can therefore be an important means by which to counter ‘western’ ontological privileging of reason over emotions, passions and feelings, as the affective nature of research topics can be brought alive, important given the ‘enlivening pain’ (Noxolo et al 2008) of many postcolonial agendas. For example, in the poems above, Gabriel touches on anger and indignation while Clare’s poem at the end of the paper opens up the ‘back box’ of the creation of academic knowledge to the emotional realm. These features can engender poetry to take on a radical edge for it can open up meaning, have imaginative potential and thus change the frame of geographical understanding. Thus poetry has the ability to redress the expressive shortfalls of prose towards ‘an otherwise eluding clarity of experience’ (Daniel and Peck 1996: 7). It can do this through multiple sensory registers, through ‘a layering of seeings, or tastings or touchings or hearings or smellings- or intersensory reverberations’ (Sherry and Schouten 2002: 219). So poetry can ‘engage the reader’s humanity and allow for a visceral resonance’ (Sherry and Schouten 2002: 218), thus becoming a means by which to experience and make sense of the world that cannot be articulated through traditional research canons.

Moreover, it is not just through the *content* of poetry that this emotive engagement can be achieved but through poetic *style* too. According to Abarry (1994), some of the principal techniques common to Akan oratory, for instance application of rhyme, repetition and

alliteration, create pleasure and contribute to retention. These poetic devices of rhythms and images are therefore effective since they concretize emotions, feelings and moods, as displayed by Gabriel's poems above. Thus Sherry and Schouten (2002) have argued that researchers who employ poetry in research produce distinctive writing that is evocative, engaging, emphatic, therapeutic, emotionally honest and compassionate. So poetry can 'show' another person how it is to feel or experience something that is beyond their direct experience: hence poetry can provide the shortest possible emotional distance between people and their differing experiences (Mock 1998). These qualities of poetry ineluctably accord it attention for its ability to convey strong and stark emotions and for the potentials it might hold in creating a dialogue across various axes of difference, both aspects of communication which are vital to the postcolonial researcher.

BRIDGING CONCEPTUAL DIVIDES

A second valuable feature of poetry is its ability to bridge conceptual divides often replicated through broadly termed Euro-American scriptural traditions but which may not be so relevant in other places. For example, poetry may be a particularly useful means to challenge the one/the multiple dualism through its ability to simultaneously weave individuality with communality, a key feature of rural Akan cosmologies. This is in parallel with the ubuntu conception of the Bantu people *nthu, nthu ne banwe* 'I am because we are'. This contrasts with the Cartesian philosophy of *cogito ergo sum* 'I think therefore I am', with its overt preponderance towards individuality, reflected in the 'egotistical sublime' (Spurr 2006: 27) of much Euro-American thought and poetry. However, while poetry may be useful in capturing a community voice on a specific issue, at the same time, it may also be a tool to incorporate the differing perceptions of different community members into that voice. This ability of the poem to convey both community and individual perspectives is illustrated in Gabriel's poems above which convey the inter- and intra-community contestations with respect to ecotourism issues in Ghana, suggesting poetry may be a context which enables complex expressions of 'voice'.

A further example of the ability of poetry to bridge conceptual divides is in its capacity to refuse to fit reality into binaries of real/unreal, living/not-living, present community/ancestors, physical/spiritual (see Mbembe 2001). Akan beliefs (often running in parallel to, or as a hybrid inter-mixing of, beliefs about Christianity) acknowledge many spiritual beings, including the supreme being, the earth goddess, the higher gods (*abosom*),

the ancestors, and a host of spirits and fetishes. The ancestors are perhaps the most important spiritual force. Each lineage reveres its important deceased members both individually and collectively. They are believed to exist in the afterlife and benefit or punish their descendants, who must pray and give sacrifices to them. After death it is believed that the soul joins the ancestors in the afterworld to be cared for by descendants within the family. Eventually the soul will be reborn within the same lineage to which it belonged in its past life. People sometimes see a resemblance to a former member in an infant and name it accordingly (hence the presence of a name such as *Ababio* (meaning you have come back) (<http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Ghana.html>). In the poems above, the interconnections between past and present community members is apparent and they express a vision of a ‘world shaped by the remembrance of fragments of life’ (Membe 2003: 6). Poetry can therefore be a means to expresses complex, unbounded, heteroglossic forms of reality that are not unilinear or monolithic and can thus move beyond simplistic and erroneous dualities. A weaved message indeed!

It is in the realms of the ‘what to speak’ (above) that we believe that poetry has a contribution to make towards furthering a postcolonial research agenda. However, when one starts to consider the ‘how to speak’ issue (see below), the use of poetry becomes more fraught.

A RELEVANT WAY OF RELATING?

Langer and Furman (2004) suggest that the traditional quantitative and qualitative research canons may be inept means to understand rural Africa, as such approaches are predicated on epistemological principles that run counter to the complexities of African cosmologies, which in part revolve around creative means of knowing. Patke (2006a: 199) has stressed that whether poetry can be useful in this process of creating knowledge is dependent ‘on how a society or a culture defines knowledge and on the function it ascribes to poetry.’ Generally speaking, poetry is an established literary genre in Africa, and it is one that is continually and communally growing (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1994). Additionally, Izevbaye (1971: 146) is of the opinion that poetry has its source in political action, thus having the capacity to make a great impact on a wide cross-section of the community. Certainly for many rural Ghanaians, poetry is an embodiment of pieces of lifeworlds, and is a common way of relating for the Akan. On this basis, it is reasonable to suggest that poetry might be a way of relating that resonates in rural Ghana. Indeed, if postcolonial analysis is to assert

new meanings to the past and present, and to uncover hidden (dis)connections, interdependencies and disjunctures, then deploying relevant approaches that provide a holistic understanding of (in our case) rural Ghanaian lifeworlds for the purposes of informing culturally competent practices, is of prime importance. Thus it is germane to explore methods and alternative language formats, such as poetry, that are more congruent with the researched worldviews and that have *potential* to (re)represent their research agendas, problems and priorities.

This is to push against hegemonic forms of knowledge production in the academic social sciences that have generally only taken seriously knowledge creation that conforms to Euro-American formats of writing, citation, and history (Jazeel and McFarlane 2007: 786). As Noxolo (2009: 56) states ‘knowledge production- even knowledge about the ‘non-West’- has been skewed towards the perspectives and modes of articulation of western writers and institutions.’ This can trivialise knowledges from other cultural positionings and depoliticize research emanating from other centers. In the case of African researchers, this can frustrate them to settle for methods incongruous with aspects of Africa’s cultural milieu. As Anyidoho has cautioned, ‘of course we are happy to be born into a Universe. But we’d love to leave our home addresses somewhere. Specific directions about our home, our houses. Our little place in a monstrous world’ (Anyidoho 1993: 28).

However, in this attempt to leave a ‘home address’, it is clear that poetry itself does not simply offer an innocent, benign way in which to sidestep the Eurocentrism of other ways of collecting, re-representing and disseminating the research endeavour. It would be a naïve approach to seek some ‘pre-colonial African oral purity’ and believe that this will automatically overcome the complex layerings of power and politics involved in knowledge construction: the employment of poetry does not *automatically* become either a route into a more egalitarian process of conducting research or a more accurate portrayal of rural Akan lifeworlds. This is because poetry is itself a genre, like any other style of writing. It is a form of representation caught within its own rules and expressions, and of course, the poetic image is not unconnected to the European and colonial encounter, as noted by Ramazani (2001) and Patke (2006b) previously. This is not to argue that the poetic voice offers *no* creative and productive potential to forge new spaces of encounter and dialogue, or to create new openings and provocations, but poetry is a genre, so as a form of representation, poetic images will ‘write’ the world in particular ways, especially through choice of language

forms^x. Thus while ‘writing back’ by using poetry might be germane to the postcolonial enterprise, it is certainly not free of the politics of its own construction, and this is nowhere more significant than when considering the thorny issue of language and translation.

LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION

While poetry has the potential to open up so-called ‘alternative’ world views, this is certainly not guaranteed and brings to the fore the deeply seated problematic of the use of the English language in conducting research in Africa. In the creation of the poems, Gabriel used English because the requirement of his British-based PhD demanded that the thesis remained in English. Indeed, many African researchers who seek to make interventions in academia have been trained in the ‘metropolis’ owing to continuing neo-colonial ties, and therefore the issue of language will continue to confront postcolonial knowledge productions and disseminations. This starts to hint at the important institutional framings involved in the production of the poetry, the difficulties of moving beyond Eurocentric constructions and the complex politics associated with knowledge creation.

In addition to the choice of language, issues in the translation of that language also become significant. It is pertinent here to consider the problem of converting oral narrative into written poems in English. While it is an important political act to attempt to counter the hierarchical opposition of oral and written culture which has been used in the denigration of African societies (Barnett 2006: 7), what issues are at stake in converting what are fluid, dynamic oral stories with rhythms, forms and textures into static, fixed, written text? What might be lost in translation? One cannot assume that writing is merely a visual substitute for speech (Barnett 2006: 7). So converting a conversation from an interview into a piece of poetry holds many of the same problems encountered when converting a piece of prose (e.g. a testimonial, using a respondent’s own words) in more conventional academic writing. However, we do think that because a poem is more likely to be spoken (at some point) than prose, it still has the potential to retain some sense of orality, acting as a bridge between the oral/written divide. Through poetry words *can* become in motion - albeit best achieved through performance - but this can also be attained to a degree through written poetry, which can reduce the closure of the printed page. Moreover, since poetry is intimately embedded in socially redeeming (Garba 2005) and political action (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1994), it might hold better promise for engendering agency than prose. But what might get lost in the translation from an oral performance is a ‘flattening’ of the context and a

‘brittling’ of the speech act, which becomes more fixed, less fluid and thus potentially less contingent. While this is a problem inherent with any written format, not just poetry, it does hint at the possibility of reinscribing ‘epistemic violence’ by reinstating ‘western’ ways of understanding (i.e. through English, through the written word). Using poetry does not necessarily mean that the Akan can express themselves in *their* voice because the very point at which the words are removed from their context and specific language form, a violation can occur. This hints at the limits of the ability to faithfully and accurately ‘re-represent’ different community voices and in so doing becoming involved in the ‘ideological subject constitution’ (Spivak 1999) whereby there is *always* a set of inescapable politics around how we re-represent others through our research writing and dissemination: we are *all* situated within personal desires, discourses, cultures, institutions and geopolitics which frame our representations (Kapoor 2004: 640-641).

It is to the thorny issue of ‘who speaks’, and how that voice is framed within the ‘teaching machine’, that we now move.

DECENTERING RESEARCH OR REINSCRIBING MARGINALITY?

To what extent might poetry be useful in decentring the researcher and responding to multiple voices or how and why might it just become a tool for reinscribing marginality? According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), the use of poetry in the social sciences arose in part from the so-called crisis of representation, when some social scientists began to resist the authoritative voice of realist ethnography, experimenting with alternative epistemic approaches in order to achieve a more multi-vocal and reflexive understanding of respondents’ realities. Poetry thus became valorised as a tool of knowledge acquisition and dissemination by researchers from various disciplines towards ensuring that research findings and representations were not homogenised and moved away from essentialist and totalising narratives (Langer and Furman 2004). Doornbos et al (2008 abstract) support this viewpoint, arguing that the use of poetry can lead to research that is emergent, elastic, and nonlinear and which provides the opportunity for researchers to collaborate, move along with the research as it unfolds and to be able to take changes in the environment and in people as an integral element of the research.

Might this inherent flexibility therefore be a means to capture the multi-vocality of a locality and at the same time enable a repositioning of the research population from the

margins to the centre of the knowledge creation process? Not necessarily. Several issues exist. The first of these is with respect to the author(ity) of the researcher. Even though Gabriel is Akan, he still mediated the voice of the researched through the condensation of the interview transcript to create the research poem, he still created the interpretive poem with his authorial additions and he still explained the meaning of the poem to the reader. These issues were in part circumscribed because the role of the researcher will always be, to some extent, to interpret and also because the poems were presented to the community and their suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the poems, so to a certain extent a mediated version of the poem was produced. However, this starts to open up questions about the extent to which the community *really* does speak and can *really* be heard through the creation of this poetry. This becomes problematic if the researcher-poet masquerades ‘as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves’ (Spivak 1988: 292). In making the claim that the creation of poetry moves the academic away from the centre of the frame, when in fact it is the researcher-poet who is precisely choosing the framing of the poem (which words and language to use, what to stress, whose voices to use), there is the distinct possibility that in their attempt to decentre the research process, the researcher-poet may actually *recentre* themselves through not making apparent their role in the creative process.

A second issue regarding speaking positions relates to how poetry might inadvertently recreate marginality within a community. Who is interviewed in the first place, and how comfortable and able they feel to speak (and whether they are heard when they do speak), may circumscribe the perspectives presented in the final poems. For example, it is only relatively recently that the omissions of women in oral and written narratives in African countries are being overcome by poets such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Ife Amadiume, and Ogundipe-Leslie, focusing both on the ventriloquist mockery of fellow women and the depth of psychic conquest women have experienced at the behest of men (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1994). The researcher-poet must be attentive to these intra-community (gender, regional, linguistic, ethnic, class, age, sexuality etc) dynamics of power. Any claim that poetry can uncomplicatedly incorporate different perceptions of community members is therefore over-simplified: poetry is not necessarily more egalitarian or participatory than conventional methods of social science knowledge generation. It is potentially just as susceptible to asymmetrical power relations, dominant voices and exclusions as any other mode of knowledge creation.

CREATING CREATIVE KNOWLEDGE

In order to think about this issue of knowledge creation it is necessary to make a ‘contrapuntal reading’ of our own positions to reveal our role in the creation of this paper, and uncover the apparent taken-for-granted power dynamics that underlie its production. We need to trace our unexamined complicities and exclusions in recognition of the role we have played in the representational process, to consider what institutional power relations these representations set up or neglect and to consider the extent to which we can attenuate these pitfalls (c.f. Kapoor 2004). We cannot assume, for example, that using poetry inevitably creates space for ‘alternative voices’ in the research process: to suggest that poetry is necessarily more plural than prose is to play down the possibility that researchers can create biased poetic interpretations that reflect their own agendas, theoretical and institutional locations, and geopolitical positionalities. Below we briefly consider these issues, for as Kalliney (2008) cautions, postcolonial theorists need a greater awareness of how we ourselves produce and circulate knowledge in a global academic context. We believe this is conterminous with Noxolo’s (2009: 56) compelling call for ‘responsible academic writing’, which is neither easy nor straightforward.

Given that poetry itself is a genre inevitably invested in degrees of western hegemonic power (not a transparent window onto worlds of difference) that is being produced in an already determined discursive space of global capital, part of a postcolonial responsibility is troubling over the poetry created through our research endeavours. Who we are, and the position we are writing from, is important in understanding the complexities and contestations of the knowledge creation process in the case of this paper. We do not have space to go into the ‘dispersed entanglements’ involved in supervisor/supervisee transnational doctoral research relations (see Eshun and Madge in progress, for details), suffice to say that our different positionings have resulted in an on-going- often transnational- dialogue in the creation of this paper: negotiations over the use of particular forms of English; contestations over the focus and scope of the paper; sensitivities towards the power differentials involved in the supervisor/supervisee relationship. We have both had to be attentive to each others’ perspectives and viewpoints in the recognition that any representation, even poetry, is inevitably loaded. As Kapoor (2004: 631) summarises with respect to representations: ‘They are determined by our favourable historical and geographic position, our material and cultural advantages resulting from imperialism and capitalism,

and our identity as privileged Westerner or native informant.’ It is in this sense we note Clare’s permanently contracted position in the neo-liberal British University system which places her at several axes of privilege, such as being in a position to take methodological risks, enabling her ‘space’ to think creatively and critically and (often not too successfully!) making a conscious effort to try and sidestep the REF-led daily pressures of British academia to open up geographical knowledge to a range of ‘cosmopolitan’ knowledges. Gabriel is in a different situation, currently living in Ghana and seeking employment in the Ghanaian university sector. He is passionate about working within the educational structure there to attempt to bridge the gap between ‘society and classroom’ by propelling alternative epistemological underpinnings to mainstream approaches to social research in Ghana that address the grounded realities of the country. However, while we both try to push at the boundaries of knowledge construction, we are aware that these limits are always set within the frame of ‘permissible terrain’, because the reality is that you would not be reading this paper unless it had met some pre-determined intellectual, publishing and marketing requirements which form some of the defining conditions of this paper’s production.

Moreover, although Gabriel occupies more of an ‘insider’ status than Clare with respect to research among the Akan, his positioning is not ‘innocent’ either. We are *both* inextricably bound up in the politics of knowledge production and we note Zeleza’s (2002: 9) caution that some African social scientists ‘romanticise’ African realities by addressing them ‘in borrowed paradigms, conversing with each other through publications and media controlled by foreign academic communities, and producing prescriptive knowledge.’ Appiah (1991: 348) has referred to these social scientists as ‘comprador intelligentsia’, which consists of a relatively small, western-style, western-trained group of writers and thinkers who can be prone to ‘projecting developmentalist/ethnocentric mythologies’ which might end up rewarding the already privileged (Kapoor 2004: 630-631). However, it must equally be noted that African researchers seeking to produce alternative methodologies and epistemologies may face an uphill challenge in terms of finance and politics in the current systems of hegemonic knowledge creation and dissemination (Serpell 1999), thus comprador intelligentsia might be in the most powerful position to contribute to alternative epistemologies. Gabriel has therefore taken a passionate stand to contribute to epistemologies more attuned to Akan world picturing, to government policy on sustainable tourism development and quality education associated with such developments. Therefore while we are both complicit in the British ‘teaching machine’, we are so to different

degrees; in other words, we are not *equally* complicit precisely because of our varying institutional framings and geopolitical positions.

So there is no necessary reason why poetry might automatically evade the institutional framing of research and produce more plural forms of knowledge - indeed, it could even be argued that the very act of using poetry can create a false sense of more participatory knowledge that still naturalises a form of western superiority and dominance (English, written text etc). Such a decentering requires far more than the act of using poetry alone. It surely depends on what is *made* of the poems, the *use* to which they are put. Thus Anyidoho (2003: 10) has argued that:

‘For as long as we cannot bring our knowledge home and share it with our people in such a way as to lead to some general transformation in the material conditions of their lives, for as long as we are unable to build our new knowledge from...the foundations of knowledge our own cultural systems have generated over the centuries, we may be engaged in nothing more than game of betrayal and of self-delusion, the dangerous and possibly suicidal game of language and the “politricks” of knowledge’.

Making apparent our positionality and the institutional framings underlying our ability to speak does not overcome the complex power relations involved in any research process. But what it perhaps *does* do is move us towards more accountable and modest versions of research creations, ones in which we can no longer pretend to have innocent and harmonious encounters with research communities. But healthy self-doubt and self-reflexivity does not have to go hand-in-hand with either critical paralysis and inaction or smug indifference- for it is through that very uncertainty that dialogue might be forged.

So it is to the issue of what might be gained by the research community through the use of poetry, and how this relates to complex responsibilities, in other words the issue of ‘why to speak’, that we finally turn.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT AND TO WHOM?

‘Giving back’ might be one way that the researcher can move away from ‘information retrieval’ and ‘the unremitting exposure of complicity’ and be responsive to the research community through exploring what the research outputs can ‘do’ for the research community, and beyond. Thus responsible research goes beyond just *writing* responsibly to encapsulate how we *act* in relation to the research outputs. In this research project, Gabriel

returned to Ghana on several occasions to present the created poems to the communities for their approval, enjoyment and later use in ecotourism education projects. Indeed, the comment that kept occurring during this process of ‘giving back’ was how the poems enabled the interviewees to gain fresh and useful perspectives on their everyday lives but in a form that was accessible to them. At Boabeng, the brother of a woman whom Gabriel was interviewing asked, not out of umbrage, but of justified emotion: ‘she is answering questions which will appear in books or be used to make something but *what will she gain from all this?*’ This question falls under the rubric of responsibility and it is at the heart of many researched communities in Africa, who covertly lament the subtle disavowal of research from their quotidian needs (Airhihenbuwa 2006). We would like to propose that the use of poetry for postcolonial geography research might be one way to think through such complex forms of responsibility and its practices. To this end, Gabriel initially discussed with the community the idea of setting up an Eco-Culture Club (BFMS-ECC), as an opportunity to do poetry performances during the proposed Monkey Festival, to encourage potential tourists to visit BFMS and bring positive livelihood benefits to their community. Gabriel has now formed an NGO in Ghana with the purpose of bringing these ideas to fruition by working with educational and environmental establishments about the possibilities of developing poetry performances at selected ecotourist sites. Such performances to ecotourists will hopefully bring cash into the communities at eco-tourist destinations as well as becoming a conduit for these communities to present their voices to local authorities, environmental organisations and international institutions on their aspirations and ambitions in terms of new forms of international relations forged through tourism. This process may aid in linking political, economic and cultural legacies with environmental issues and ‘dig into the past’ to create space to speak with the present-future realities of the people at BFMS. Thus in this case responsibility is not just about voice (poetry) but also what difference that voice can make to the everyday realities of the researched communities. It is through the *enactment* of poetry, through it being brought alive through performance by the researched community that improvements might be made to current livelihoods and future aspirations at BFMS.

However, we are not in any way suggesting that there is a perfect or quick fix in this giving back; it is inevitably a complex process of working in small, everyday ways with various community members (with differing agendas, power leverages and influences), institutional organisations and inter/national policy-making bodies, located within the parameters of

imperial global capital. It is a process of listening, hearing and responding with an open agenda that questions who exactly is the expert. But it might also involve being bold and indignant and articulate about challenging the multiple hierarchies upon which varying spatial geometries of injustice exist. This long-term process of painstaking and careful commitment may be a way in which researchers can move towards speaking with, albeit it always from a contaminated position. It may also be a way to start to embed postcolonial theory in practice in the search to contribute to progressive change in the daily circumstances of the communities with whom we are working. This is a case where ‘responsibility’ might be carried beyond the domains of rhetoric towards a more engaged pragmatic responsiveness (Raghuram et al 2009). So it is our belief that it is in what is ‘done’ with the poems, what difference they make, what work they can do through performance, that the most radical and responsible versions of poetry may lie. However, we cannot assume that poetry has an inevitable, certain, positive agency which represents a move in the direction of responsibility. Indeed, poetry *per se* has no predictable agency at all. What is crucial is not the method, but the politics of the researcher. In other words, it is not using poetry alone that will determine if it furthers a postcolonial agenda, rather it is the underlying intentionality and political praxis of that poetry that is significant.

Our aim in employing poetry is therefore to push at the boundaries of knowledge creation but as we have shown this is a troubling process that will involve ‘slippages between abiding and distancing, between knowledge and representation, and the connections between theory and politics...this processis central to the production of responsible postcolonial knowledges’ (Jazeel and McFarlane 2007: 784). Stressed differently, not only does a postcolonial researcher have the responsibility to bring to the fore the need to explore dimensions that highlight ‘the importance of ‘clearing space’ for a much wider range of perspectives on an irretrievably interlinked world’ (Noxolo 2009: 56) but they also have the responsibility to make apparent the complexities and contestations involved in that very process of space clearing itself. So this is a sideways version of responsibility, one in which the responsibilities of the researcher are towards shifting centres of knowledge production and through that process making crystal clear that there are *never* any easy and definitive answers to responsible research praxis. We must be constantly mindful of the *limits* to power-laden forms of responsibility, of the complex processes which might mute the ability and preponderance to speak, hear, listen or respond. We must therefore take care not to assume ourselves to be in a position of responsibility towards the research community, for

under such imposed versions of responsibility, the space of agency of the community can become erased. Rather, we seek to understand, respect and work with the active agency of the community in which we carry out our research, while at the same time employing our relative privileges to help move their experiences and aspirations further into the domain of proactive knowledges where the onus is to share a ‘similar breath of vision’ (albeit articulated and experienced in different ways) towards a more humane and equitable world.

Thus our original supposition that poetry can speak with a community has become increasingly muddled, troubled and contested as we have delved deeper. The potentialities of poetry start unravelling and dissolving under interrogation in a simultaneous process of formation and dissolution, a sort of continuous jumping back and forth between one horizon and another (c.f. Mbembe 2003) which both acknowledges the ‘protean adaptability of imperial power in an increasingly globalized world’ but which also insists on the potential ‘agency’ of the research community (Ashcroft 2011: 19). Speaking with thus depends not only on what is being said, but also on who is speaking, why, how and what is ‘done’ with that voice. There is no turning away from the difficulties that this involves: this can be an uncertain, vulnerable and destabilising position for the academic to inhabit. But this is *precisely* because the unfinished project of decolonisation *is* a disconcerting, demanding and continuous process. The claim that we can make, therefore, is a modest and cautious recognition of the potential that poetry holds as just *one* facet of the postcolonial researcher’s toolkit, one aspect of a postcolonial methodological bricolage that might gently move in the direction of a postcolonial method, if we are willing to take the risks and make the actions that this might involve. We now move on to some concluding remarks.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article we have set out to ‘seize back the creative initiative’ (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1987: 4) to uncover whether poetry might be a useful postcolonial research tool. In exploring some of the potentials and limitations of poetry as a postcolonial method our conclusions are ambivalent: we are both attracted to poetry, but troubled by it too. In terms of attraction, we believe that social scientists can utilise poetry as a means of re-representing and interpreting data in qualitative research to help convey the complexities and emotions of various lived experiences. Since ‘poetry is the opportunity to live the circumstances and experiences of others’ (Lahman et al 2010: 5), it can also imaginatively project thoughts and ideas, opening up space so new meanings, understandings and perspectives can emerge; it

thus has potential in altering thinking and practices and challenging hegemonic knowledge creation. But poetry is not automatically transformative - it is just as prone to exploitation as any other research method. So the significant issue is not simply the creation of poetry in and of itself but it is also about what poetry can *do* for the research community. In this case of this example, by expounding on community beliefs about monkeys and by shifting the terrain by which the community participated in the eco-tourism venue, we believe that poetry has a useful role to play in enabling transformations at eco-destinations. Paying attention to the perspectives and priorities of the community, and their beliefs and worldviews, may be one means to move towards ensuring sustainability of both people and their environment. Thus poems might be a means of 'space clearing' which makes room for a relocation based on a reclamation of (albeit mediated) rural Akan 'realities'.

However, although we are attracted to the use of poetry for postcolonial research, we are making a sensitive and careful appeal for its use. For while poetry may be a means by which academic geographers can explore their complex responsibilities to research communities through the articulations of intricate expressions of voice, the representative qualities of poetry are never unproblematic and straightforward. While poetry does hold promise in moving towards a two-way conversation across differences which has potentiality to challenge the reproduction of (neo)colonial relations through its ability to ignite the imagination beyond direct experience, as academics we are always complicit in the knowledge creation process, albeit with varying degrees of complicity. So although poetry might stimulate a dynamic dialogue that enables the researcher and research community to tack 'back and forth' between the guardrails of 'transnational landscapes of knowledge production' (Jazeel and McFarlane 2007: 784), the limits of this dialogue must always be acknowledged. Expressions of (in this case Akan) voices are all very well, but if they cannot be heard or understood, or the conditions, institutions and power relations in which they are received remain unchanged, poems might become little more than 'getting a bit of the other'. This might have the distinct possibility of reinforcing, rather than dismantling, the kinds of power dynamics, rehearsals of otherness and exclusion and geography's colonial gaze, that we so hope poems might be able to redress (particularly in the light of our awareness that some poetry has been instrumental in the colonisation of the minds of (post)colonial subjects in many places). Such paradoxes of artistic creation are at the heart of this paper. As Kalliney (2008: 16) tellingly notes: 'The terms of this paradox, in which the politically marginal becomes part of a cultural dominant (or more precisely, a site of symbolic

prestige), point to the difficulties of interpreting the political function of works of art in a postcolonial age.’ There is thus a need to move beyond simplistic calls for inclusion to reflect the mirror back to decipher how intellectual communities and institutions are implicated in upholding and perpetuating iniquitous systems of global power and how these might be challenged to create more equitable and just research relations.

This in turn leads us, as academic geographers, to reflect on questions such as: What are the politics associated with particular linguistic forms? How are these underlain by historical global relationships of exploitation, inequality, resistance and withdrawal? What are the economic, political and cultural conditions under which we are creating and circulating particular forms of academic geographical knowledge and how do these conditions frame the creations we make, how we present them, and how we describe our own role in that process? How can we develop new ways of speaking about our positionality that turns us out of ourselves, that lays out much broader trajectories for our subjectification and that inscribes our existence in a much wider field of human experience (Osha 2000)? Can the ‘subaltern’ ever really speak, or be heard, even through poetry? What multifaceted efforts that go well beyond the academy are needed for this to occur (for example, involving national governments, civil society organisations, multilateral organisations etc)? Will there always be a sense of ‘contamination’ (c.f. Spivak 2008) which makes it impossible to reject a system of unequal power relations whilst one continues to benefit materially from it? Maybe, in practice, it is ‘the least grave of these forms of complicity’ (Spivak 2008: 63) that we seek in moving towards a ‘common spirit of purpose’? These are troubling problematics brought to the fore through the consideration of poetry as a postcolonial method.

Paradoxes and troubles also spill over in the claims we are making about *where* poetry might be used as a research tool. On the one hand, we would hold on to suggestion that poetry might be a method that is finely attuned to the rural Ghanaian Akan situation where constantly evolving oral legacies are still lucent and trenchant, and through which the Akan might make specific counter discourses. On the other hand, we would want to avoid ‘falling into trap of associating particular points of view too exclusively with particular places’ (Butz 2011: 44) and strongly rebuke any idea that we are arguing for a ‘native’ way of relating in opposition to western way (just as there is no one, singular, universal, hegemonic western thought there are a multiplicity of ways of relating in rural Africa). So we would simultaneously want to make a claim that poetry might be useful for many other researchers

in many other geographical contexts too, being used as a means to create a range of provincial cosmopolitan geographical knowledges (Morin and Rothenberg 2011). Rural Ghana (in all its heterogeneity) happens to be one of those places because of its preponderance of oral culture but poetry could be used as an empowering research tool elsewhere because it is inclusive of non-textual cultures and it therefore may be a means to account for ‘complex affiliations which stretch well beyond national boundaries’ (Kalliney 2008: 13). Moreover, we are not arguing exclusively for *only* poetry as an artistic form (for many of the points we make above may be equally applicable to literature, or dance, for example); rather we are simply suggesting that poetry is but one tool in the postcolonial geographer’s handbag which might brim with all manner of other artistic creations.

We will conclude therefore by urging that poetry should not be considered as an instrumental, all-encompassing, unproblematic method, but rather it should be envisaged as one method that has potential to be able to respond to the different spatialities of the postcolonial, albeit in ways that are provisional, open-ended and constantly under review. We join numerous other writers (Membe 2001; Mufti 2005 etc) in making a claim for the ability of creative artists to be able ‘to express most forcefully the imaginative vision of a society’ (Ashcroft et al 1995: 5) who by ‘taking hold of writing’ can shift the terrain of existing discursive and institutional formations and unleash ‘a rapidly circulating transcultural energy’ (Ashcroft 2001: 19). It is our belief that poetry might be one such way of being creative, setting free this transcultural energy which might bring the academic geographer closer to some kind of responsible or engaged praxis that acknowledges its accountability to people and place. As a consequence, this paper ultimately is less about poetry *per se*, but rather, it is an insistent call for more creativity as a key dimension to postcolonialising contemporary geographical research. As Ashcroft (2001: 21) neatly summarizes: ‘Political and social change only occur because they occur in the minds of those who imagine a different kind of world.’ To this end (and the paradoxes of finishing the paper in such a manner are not lost on the authors), Clare finishes with a poem:

Beside ourselves

As i journey through this paper
Undermining my very position as i preach
What ability do you have to speak through this
Shattered remnant called body?
This fragmented mouth of spit called language?
If you hold me up to the light

My complicity is transparent
My tongue, my skin, my bones.
For you helped make me what i am
You made me what i could be.
My gratitude runs deep, me da se,
But is so lightly spoken, nyanko,
As a lingering trace of hair in the breeze
As a cloudburst creeping down my face
That is so gentle
It is not even visible.
For how can i speak of you
Of whom i have not met
What thinly veiled arrogance
What loftiness
Drifts from my ink stained hands?
But what i do know
What I have felt to the very depths of my being
To my last pathetic breath
And my insistent will to survive and survive some more
Is that while we are not equal in dying
When the blood stops running in my veins
It is red
And when the blood stops running in your veins
It is red too.
So i will wrestle and roar
Again and again and again and yet again
In this mixed up mad world
In this place of constant unknowing and vulnerable future
To stretch beyond the turquoise horizon
And carve out a space
Where we can both feel a sense of home
Beside ourselves
Akwaaba.
(Clare Madge, 2011)

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NOTES

ⁱ In using 'we', we are not suggesting some simplistic, harmonious and equal speaking position. But rather, we use it as a marker of healthy, mutual and dialogic respect for one another.

ⁱⁱ The discussion below focuses on European colonialism in Africa, particularly British colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa, and on written poetry in the English language. There are many other forms of colonialism, including non-European forms of territorial domination (see Baird 2011) and also other forms of poetry not written in English, or not even scriptural. However, whilst not wishing to over-emphasise European colonialism, in the case of Ghana, this intervention was probably most pervasive, sustained and violent and had major influences on the development of written literature and language. Additionally, the impact, structure and nature of colonialism depended not only on the colonizing power and the period of intervention but also on the nature of the specific receiving society too. All these factors suggest that European colonialism, and western thought commonly linked to it, were (and continue to be) far from hegemonic and undifferentiated. Similarly, owing to the numerous regional, political, ethnic, language etc differences within and between African nations, there is no one, undifferentiated 'African' poetry, even at a regional scale.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is perhaps surprising given the numerous poets that abound from Africa including Kofi Anyidoho (Ghana), Kofi Awoonor (Ghana), Dennis Brutus (South Africa), Abbe Gubenga (Ethiopia), Jonathan Kariara (Kenya), Susan Kiguli (Uganda), Christopher Okigbo (Nigeria), Lenrie Peters (Gambia) and Dagnachew Werku (Ethiopia), to name a few. Extracts are quoted from poems in the discussion below.

^{iv} It must be noted that many contemporary poets resist the application of the term 'postcolonial' to their work because it '...perpetuates dependency, homogenizes difference, simplifies complexity, misdirects reading, practices a form of nominalist colonization, and pushes literary uniqueness into a ghetto where academics fight over intellectual property while professing to bring writers from the margins closer to the metropolitan centre' (Patke 2006b: 12).

^v In this paper we use the term Africa (rather than sub-Saharan Africa, for example) as a marker of potential unity in diversity, as a signal towards hope and possibility, whilst also

acknowledging the manifold differences and ‘dispersed entanglements’ that make up different African territories at a variety of spatial scales.

^{vi} More recent African poetry has moved away from considerations of the past and relations with colonizing powers to consider internal differentiations and social inequalities within African societies. Tanzanian Chrispin Hauli presents social oppression in terms of physical and psychological domination in the extract from his poem ‘The song of the common man’:

These my brothers no longer brothers-
Their hands are whips, along they drive me...

These my sisters no longer sisters -
Their mouths are cannons, spittles of fire...

These my playmates no longer playmates -
Their actions are fates, my life they decide...

(quoted by Nwachukwu-Agbada 1994: 290-291).

Paralleling these moves in the content of poetry, the spatial frame of more recent African poetry has also changed with a greater focus on particularism and locality, rather than on the continental or regional scale of the post-independence poetry (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1994).

^{vii} It is not the intention of this paper to go into the methodological procedure for creating research and interpretive poems. For methodological detail see Eshun (in progress).

^{viii} Among the Akan, a fetish priest (priestess for woman) is called *Okomfo*. The fetish priest serves a spirit known in Akan as *obosom* (pl. *abosom* or lesser god), which is represented by an object and is usually enclosed in a place known as a fetish shrine (*Abosom fie*). A fetish priest(ess) consults his or her god to ask for favour or to remove calamities. They once enjoyed an indubitable position in Akan cosmology because of their spiritual powers (their power was realized through the physical, the spiritual, the environmental, financial etc.). However, the widespread adoption of (especially) Christianity has challenged their spiritual powers and reduced their influence.

^{ix} It is also acknowledged that by talking to such authority figures, other perspectives may be marginalised- for example, women’s views, the young and the sick.

^x Thanks to the perceptive comments of a reviewer for this point.