

*“Those Mean and
Empty-Headed Men”:
The Shifting Representations of Wealth
in Two Ghanaian Popular Novels*

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THE GHANAIAN ECONOMY was in a state of “extreme turbulence,” even collapse, by the end of the 1970s, a condition which persisted well into the 1980s (Nugent 17). During the price-boom years of the 1950s, cocoa farmers had operated in an economy in which large-scale producers could amass wealth and transform their social status from “commoners” to “Big Men.”¹ By the late 1970s, however, excessive taxation of cocoa producers had led to smuggling and decreasing production levels in the cash-crop sector; rapid inflation had set in, rising from 10.1 per cent in 1972 to 116.5 per cent in 1977, causing shortages of fuel, consumer goods, spare parts and imported commodities (Nugent 26; Boahen 9). Economic mismanagement and natural disasters at home combined with political instabilities in the region to create a climate of uncertainty: the social effects of inflation, drought and forest fires were compounded in 1983 by the forced repatriation of over one million Ghanaians from Nigeria. Where their parents and grandparents might have accumulated savings as cocoa producers, as commercial brokers for foreign merchants or as educated professionals, Ghanaian workers now found their forebears’ routes to wealth blocked by the recession. Clearly, the potential sources of wealth available to Ghanaians had shifted over time.

This article explores the manner in which the changing economic climate in Ghana has been accompanied by shifts in the way wealth is conceptualized within locally published novels. These popular narratives—which are produced on regional printing presses, often paid for and disseminated by the authors

themselves—actively recreate the variety of moral meanings that are commonly attached to the accumulation of wealth. Generating new meanings and incorporating residual attitudes towards wealth, Ghanaian novelists are “reading” and responding to the economy through their protagonists and plots.

Richard Priebe is one of the few scholars to have studied Ghanaian popular literature in detail, writing as the publishing industry went into a decline from which it has not yet recovered. Priebe notices a preoccupation with personal hygiene in novelles published after the fall of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966. In response to the stains that had spread through Nkrumah’s government in the early 1960s, Priebe argues, authors turned in on their communities, translating corruption at a national level into a “puritanical” sexual ethic directed particularly against promiscuous women: female sexuality, when misused, is represented as a threat both to the male body and to the body politic (413-16). The character types to be found in popular fiction are connected with political realities by a direct “text-context” relationship and a “serious moral” impulse can be located in the most raunchy romance (410). The protagonist’s moral cleanliness is used by authors to symbolize a political desire for a morally clean nation-state. In apparently apolitical texts one can therefore find “serious and very conservative statement[s] about the moral health of society” (411).

In Priebe’s reading, popular novels are vessels containing authors’ frustrated political hopes. Requiring release, these sentiments are formed into “polluted” character types—most of which are female—created in order to symbolize how the polity has degenerated. According to this interpretation, when the unfaithful heroines of local publications are punished for their sexual promiscuity, they in fact represent a symbolic resolution of Ghanaians’ frustrations about their newly formed nation-state.

By emphasising the submerged political themes attaching to protagonists, Priebe retrieves local publications from the dismissive standpoint of critics who set Ghanaian popular novels against “serious” African literature and complain that the former lack political engagement.² A straightforward “text-context” relationship cannot, however, be found in the novels to be explored

here. Fluctuations in global cash-crop prices, for example, are not reflected unambiguously in a protagonist's attitudes towards farming and agricultural wealth. Rather, authors are engaged in an ongoing process of constructing symbolic economies: they convert and transform real economic relationships into symbolic ones and help to generate explanations of (mis)fortune that will touch the experiences of their readers. Real economic conditions are absorbed into the symbolic space of popular fiction. The economy is converted into a textual "event," attached to character types through whose experience moral messages about money can be conveyed and, finally, transformed by this process into a complex, sometimes contradictory set of interpretations of wealth in contemporary society.³

Popular interpretations of the origins and uses of immense wealth have changed significantly since Independence. Through a comparative study of two locally produced Ghanaian novels, published twenty years apart, I intend to explore the ways in which specific economic conditions have generated different conceptualizations of wealth. As we shall see, Ghana's "real" monetary economy is not erased in this process: it is translated into "money moralities" in which an individual's struggle to make and invest capital is equated with his or her moral worth.

Victor Amarteifio's *Bediako the Adventurer* (1985) was first published in the Twi language in 1967 and Kwame Osei-Poku's *Blood for Money* was first published in English in 1989. Both novels depict commoners seeking elevation to "Big Man" status, and both have the generation, retention and investment of wealth as their central concerns. However, the potential money-making opportunities available to an ambitious Ghanaian "youngman" are configured very differently in the two texts.⁴ In discussing the reasons for these differences, I will be suspending textual analysis at regular intervals and using the narratives to open up a situational analysis of the specific economic and cultural contexts within which they were composed.

After periods of price-rises, wage decreases, inflation and social unrest between 1939 and 1948, the sudden and seemingly limitless influx of foreign exchange during the cocoa-boom years of the 1950s allowed Nkrumah to nurture the image of Ghana as a land of plenty. He announced in a speech:

[Our goals are] the total abolition of unemployment, malnutrition and illiteracy, and the creation of conditions where all our people can enjoy good health, [and] proper housing, where our children can have the best of educational facilities and *where every citizen has the fullest opportunities to develop and use his [sic] skills and talents.*
(Qtd. in Robertson 39; emphasis added)

Nkrumah's comments imply that through hard work an ordinary man one day will be able to harness the new forms of wealth, increase his purchasing power and perhaps become a man of status in his community. The country's substantial foreign exchange reserves had, however, been depleted by the mid-1960s. Ghana's downward economic spiral started at this time, when Nkrumah's government failed to respond to the slump in international cocoa prices or to stem the individualistic appropriation of national resources by corrupt officials. Surrounded by a population suffering from unemployment, high inflation and scarcities in imported goods, the Big Men in Nkrumah's government cut themselves loose from the very communities in which they distributed their wealth and acquired recognition.⁵

Published the year after Nkrumah's fall, *Bediako the Adventurer* (1967) opens with an accusation which inverts the President's vision of an egalitarian society.⁶ A young man indirectly suggests that Bediako has acquired his wealth in the manner of a corrupt official, through speculation and hoarding rather than through productive hard work. When three youths catch sight of Bediako's "posh two-storeyed house," one of them comments that to be able to afford such luxury the owner must be "one of those mean and empty-headed men who never struggle much, yet get richer and richer to a point where they don't know what to do with themselves" (11). Contained within this comment is the presupposition that readers will recognize a contemporary social type, for Bediako is alluded to as "one of *those . . . men.*" Positioned thus, little more needs to be added about the source of Bediako's apparently unearned wealth. The speaker is interpellating a local reader who will be able to interpret the insinuation and connect it with a popular belief about Big Men's malpractices in Ghana.

Also embedded in the young man's comment—in an unmarked form—is an archaic reference to an individual's per-

sonal destiny, which cannot be reigned in or controlled. Regardless of individual agency, an amoral force appears to have helped Bediako to get "richer and richer" (see McCaskie, *State and Society*). If such a reference to Bediako's auspicious destiny is present, however, it is absorbed into a far more specific opinion about the Big Man's moral laxity: the youth situates Bediako in a popular moral economy in which immense wealth is equated with "meanness" towards his community, laziness and a lack of "struggle." These interpenetrating perceptions of wealth contest Nkrumah's futuristic image of a time when human agency—hard work, skills and talents—will generate health and housing for the masses. Instead, money seems to have fallen from nowhere onto the "happy" man.

The young men's negative judgements spring from the sight of the rich man's house and it shows their sense of alienation from the conspicuous symbols of a Big Man's status. Instead of manifesting his hard work and auspicious destiny, Bediako's money supplies are infused with the onlookers' concerns about the struggle to survive in the 1960s: like a speculator on the commodity markets, his wealth seems to stem from self-generating sources and not from productive labour.

The youths voice common opinions about the economic transformations that had occurred in the final years of Nkrumah's government. On a microeconomic scale, during Nkrumah's period in power the cocoa-farming commoners and entrepreneurial "youngmen" who had, for decades, been able to gain wealth and status in the cash-crop sector, experienced dramatic shifts in the sources of possible wealth. Trade and commerce had largely centered upon productive activities until the mid-1960s, when fluctuations in the world market price for Ghana's monocrop altered the potential sources of wealth. Money-making opportunities shifted at this time towards speculative activities (see Nugent, *Big Men*). The ebbs and flows of money that speculators played with were linked to Ghana's trading status as a producer of cocoa, the price of which producers could not control; in addition, foreign exchange was largely contained within a small, politically well-connected class of men who did indeed appear to be getting "richer and richer" without creating or marketing a visible product.⁷

The protagonist of Amarteifio's novel is keen to distance himself from the young men's presuppositions about the source of his wealth. Bediako invites the boys into his house and narrates his life-story to them, and the entire novel is built around an effort to justify this Big Man's moral worth. He tells his internal audience at the start of his story:

My advice to you is that wherever you may go and whenever you find any person who in your opinion, is more successful, wealthier or happier than you are—as I assume you think I must be—don't be tempted to say that he has had an easy life all the way. (18)

An alternative money morality is created in the course of the novel to resist and displace the values applied by the youths. Repeatedly, Bediako insists that the vacillating money supplies in an individual's life are *divinely* regulated, and that a man's income is decided ultimately by God, who sits in judgement of his social behaviour: "It is only God who . . . knows all about us, and what the future has in store for us," he says, adding that, "If we follow the teachings of Christ, we shall always succeed; it is only when we turn against the ways of God that we find life so bitter and not worth living" (116). Bediako emphasizes that God distributes and takes away money, and humans can only regulate their incomes by conforming to Christian moral precepts. The important point, here, is that God becomes a kind of divine speculator in this moral economy, investing large sums of money in individual "goods" and watching them fail or succeed in realising their moral value.

Bediako's sin, remorse, repentance, and final acceptance of his social responsibilities as a husband are paralleled in the morally equivalent realm of money: abject poverty strikes when he evicts his wife from the house and enters an adulterous relationship with a "good-time girl"; money "flees" from him when he enters a period of purgation, wandering aimlessly through the Ghanaian borderlands with no social roots or family connections; and enormous wealth descends as if from nowhere when he has repented and accepted responsibility for his sins. A superior, aloof force seems to be intervening each time, tossing money to and fro before depositing it in the passive protagonist's lap. The author rationalizes and moralizes this extreme, almost

amoral force which is all-giving and all-punishing, blind to human systems of justice. Amarteifio seems to have applied the Christian idea of God to the residual Ashanti concept of an uncontrollable, whimsical force which directs a person's fate or destiny. In precolonial Ashanti, *Onyame* named the "withdrawn God," a "remote and allocative rather than approachable and flexible judge" (McCaskie 107). The power of *Onyame* has been preserved, then, but it has been translocated into Christian doctrine and attached to the Christian God.

A "troll" initiates Bediako's financial downfall: the "captivating," "irresistible" young woman tempts Bediako away from his marriage and gains access to all of his hard-earned cash (58). While his pregnant wife is staying with her mother, Feli arrives from an unknown location, "and brought about, in my happy and prosperous life, a change quite startling in its suddenness" (52). An explicit parallel is thus established between a man's loss of control over his wealth and his sexual abandonment to a woman.

Feli is not a simple character into whom Amarteifio pours the final responsibility for his protagonist's downfall. She is a transitional and catalytic figure in the narrative, opening the door to a universe which contains multiple punishments sent directly to Bediako from God. Immediately after meeting Feli, in a realm that cannot be disconnected from his infidelity, his money gains a momentum of its own: having let go of his masculine status as a husband and householder, Bediako is punished in the material world. In the space of two pages he is sacked for defrauding his company, thieves ransack his house, debt-collectors insist upon repayment and Feli disappears from the relationship leaving outstanding debts (67-68). Left without status or resources, Bediako is nothing as a human being.

Feli embodies a set of warnings aimed at men about the dire social consequences of sexual irresponsibility. She is significant to the moral economy of the novel, for it is *through* her that Bediako loses control of his conscience, savings and social status, and once he has been cast out of society for his sexual sins, large quantities of money start to appear and disappear at whim. A "miserly" uncle leaves his secretly hoarded wealth to Bediako,

but the extended family intervenes, reclaims and redistributes the money (140-43); thrown into extreme poverty, Bediako climbs a tree to hang himself, only to witness two members of his family bury his uncle's treasure-box, which he retrieves as his rightful inheritance (146-47); simultaneously, friends arrive with the good news that his cocoa plantation has yielded an enormous harvest and made him a rich man (147). "Now, my friends, what had I discovered?" Bediako asks his audience of young men as he begins to interpret these sudden inflows of wealth, "The very Saturday that I felt that luck had forsaken me and that all was lost and life not worth living, God revealed himself once more to me in the most astonishing manner" (150).

Wealth does not come from nowhere, and a man does not get "richer and richer" for no reason. Bediako is explaining his good fortune by linking "luck"—or his new-found ability to harness wealth—with the principle of divine intervention, which is manifested on earth through money.⁸ "Let us now go back to your original statement that money runs easily," the hero concludes, "sinner as I am, God has always had mercy and pardon for me" (153). Human agency is excluded from this money morality. By situating his protagonist within a Christian discourse, Amarteifio has disconnected the Big Man from the domestic economy and conceptualized his wealth in terms of divine punishment and forgiveness. Immense wealth is thus legitimized and rationalized through Christianity, for the Big Man's material goods are manifestations of God's reward to individuals who live according to abstract Christian values.

The sense of uncontrol over money that emerges in *Bediako the Adventurer* is not connected to the concept that cash is "evil." Quite the reverse: there are several clearly differentiated sources of wealth in the novel, both earned and inherited, and none of them is unambiguously "good" or "evil." Money is an elusive, contradictory substance in the novel. Amarteifio instills this slippery resource with "good" or "bad" qualities by leashing it to a religious pole, but, in itself, it has no essential moral meaning. Through Christianity the author is able to create the impression that cash-flows are divinely regulated and that money is the

earthly sign of the value God places upon an individual's life. Any political critique of the Ghanaian Big Men who became rich during the 1960s is made irrelevant by this image of God. Bediako's explanations thus resist the young men's insinuation that his wealth has political sources.

Viewed in the context of the corruption and cocoa slump occurring in Ghana when the novel was first published, it becomes possible to see how economic conditions have infiltrated the narrative, only to be reconceptualized by the author. Amarteifio has recognized "those men" who hoard Ghana's resources, but he has managed to legitimize certain other types of wealth by having his protagonist reject the accusation that he is a self-motivated speculator. An alternative money morality is promoted which resists the young men's opinions. By situating his protagonist within a noticeably nonpolitical discourse, Amarteifio retrieves the possibility that, despite political corruption, a poor man can still become a Big Man if he conforms to strict moral precepts based upon sexual self-control and Christian family values.

Between 1972 and 1977, Lieutenant General Acheampong's regime increased the domestic money supply by eighty per cent, creating uncontrollable inflation. The economy was saturated with new cedis, described by Mike Oquaye as "loose money in a few hands" (29), and giving "the impression that the government was printing money at whim" (Robertson 42). Appearing as if from nowhere, the freshly minted currency made ordinary workers' incomes worth less by the day and generated widespread malpractices. The salaried middle classes, composed of professionals and civil servants, were forced to supplement the fixed amounts they earned each month with entrepreneurial, farming or smuggling activities. Teachers turned their cars into taxis after work; civil servants left work early to tend subsistence crops or, if well-connected, they imported spare parts and consumer goods for sale on the black market; and some market women aggravated the scarcity economy by hoarding produce and waiting for prices to rise.⁹

Most of these practices were basic survival strategies undertaken by men and women facing desperation at home. For over a

decade, traders and white-collar workers alike suffered massive hardships as commodity prices soared and their purchasing power diminished. Meanwhile, the new Big Men and wealthy women who had access to sources of hard currency increased their expenditure on prestige goods such as Mercedes-Benzes and large purpose-built houses, illustrating in a concrete manner the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Openly parading their wealth at funerals, weddings and other status-conferring occasions, the Big Men of the 1970s, like their newly rich predecessors, would publicly distribute cash and consumer goods. Through these "social investments" they sought social recognition and support, vital requirements in the maintenance of their status (see Ekejiuba, "Currency Instability").

Inevitably, popular attitudes towards wealth and accumulation have been affected by these new modes of money-making in Ghana. A great deal of recent anthropological research has focused upon the connections between West Africa's fluctuating economic status in relation to regional and global markets, and the shifting representations of accumulated wealth in popular discourses about money (e.g. Parry and Bloch, *Money and the Morality of Exchange*; Guyer, *Money Matters*). The moral and symbolic values placed upon accumulation are not static or singular, for within the diverse cultures that constitute West African nations, multiple meanings attach to money at specific historical moments. Money has been circulating in West Africa for centuries, and economic fluctuations have generated complex narratives about the origins of fortune and misfortune.¹⁰

Some individuals accumulated immense amounts of wealth during the Ghanaian economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s. As ordinary workers watched the successful few parade their wealth and enhance their power within their communities, a new economic practice was diagnosed, gaining popular currency as living conditions worsened for the masses: newly rich individuals were labelled "*kalabule* operators." Describing men and women whose wealth derived from illicit sources, the term *kalabule* contained a network of negative references, all relating to the moral peril of money-making and its individualistic uses. Possibly deriving from the Hausa expression *kere kabure*, meaning "keep it

quiet," *kalabule* referred to individuals who had abandoned productive labour in favour of speculative activities such as smuggling and hoarding, or who had accepted "commissions" from corrupt officials in government agencies (see Oquaye, *Politics in Ghana*). *Kalabule* operators were profiteers who had access to Ghana's hidden stores of wealth. Rather than converting this currency into socially acceptable investments, they were believed to be hiding their stores from the rest of society, converting it into essential commodities which they would withhold, ready to sell to needy locals at inflated prices.

As a new and popular classification, *kalabule* conveyed a significant shift in popular conceptualizations of wealth and accumulation. The label became so widespread as a description of the newly rich that by the early 1980s it had permeated and transformed the established category of "Big Man." This latter type is a far more favourable figure in Ghanaian popular typologies, emerging in the late nineteenth century to describe educated, business-minded "youngmen" who engaged in trading and brokering activities with European cocoa firms.¹¹ Challenging the ranks of chiefs and elders, the Big Man gained economic power by his own hard work, and his vast reserves of accumulated wealth were seen to derive from legitimate sources. As we have seen in the figure of Bediako, the Big Man works hard and is also blessed with an auspicious destiny. This social type is an individual who has managed to discover the source of money and harness it for his personal use: he only retains a hold upon the slippery material, which might leave him at any time, by making substantial "social investments" involving the distribution of large gifts at community events.¹²

Paul Nugent points out that during the fiscal crises of the 1970s and 1980s, almost any kind of brokering activity in Ghana was regarded as a *kalabule* operation: "Whereas the successful entrepreneur had once been the object of praise and emulation, his or her activities were increasingly regarded as both underhand and parasitic" (28). By 1981, as Flight Lieutenant Rawlings took power for the second time and pledged to cleanse society of financial malpractices, "the popular critique of speculation came close to offering an indictment of the dominant class as a

whole" (35). It was as if the majority of the population, having struggled to produce the smallest of incomes, were acknowledging the demise of the Big Man as a type with relevance to their own lives and admitting the impossibility of their ever attaining "Big" status in contemporary Ghanaian society.

By the early 1980s, the term *kalabule* had been gendered as feminine. Women traders in Accra's main market started to be blamed for the country's moral and economic decline (Nugent 80). By focusing on local women rather than abstract fiscal policies, the accusers—journalists, politicians and members of the public—were isolating real bodies from Ghana's uncontrollable economy and holding them responsible both for "immorality" and for the population's financial hardships. Market women were homogenized and stereotyped, and this process allowed a compound of meanings to be attached to their physical bodies. With popular support and the backing of President Jerry Rawlings, soldiers raided and destroyed Makola No. 1 market in Central Accra; price controls were imposed on the market women's produce, and "small boys" from Rawlings' People's Defence Committees (PDCs) were installed to regulate their sales; when they tried to demonstrate at Burma Camp, the market women were chased away by groups of angry "youngmen" (Nugent 80). Symbolic qualities had been attached to a particular class of women. In this way—and here popular discourse upholds Richard Priebe's analysis of the function of feminine characters in popular narratives ("Popular Writing" 413-16)—collective frustrations about the unfair distribution of wealth in Ghana could be projected onto the traders.

Another type of woman also was accused of cashing in on Ghana's unevenly distributed "loose money" supplies at this time (Oquaye 29): *unmarried* young women were held to be responsible for damaging the economy, and they too were singled out in the media. In a book published at the time of these accusations, Mike Oquaye (1980) describes how, during Acheampong's regime, young women would sexually manipulate men in order to secure contracts and "commissions." In a lengthy and exclusively woman-centered critique, he writes:

Young women obtained millions of cedis worth of import licences which they often resold at three times the value. . . . Big-turbaned,

pretty women bought and sold every conceivable item. . . . These *kalabule* women rode in the choicest cars and attended parties on end with commissioners, top military men and their associates. (17-18)

As Oquaye's economic analysis demonstrates, one of the problems with an exclusive emphasis on women's role in African "money moralities" is that *men* tend to be neglected as generators of illicit wealth.

Unmarried young women and market women might be familiar, recurrent figures in explanations of (mis)fortune, but other more ambiguous character types also surface in Ghanaian popular discourses on the subject of wealth. As in the numerous "satanic possession" testimonies produced within charismatic Christian churches, women feature as temptresses and the Devil's minions, but ultimately it is *male* protagonists who choose the unholy route to wealth and status in many contemporary narratives.¹³

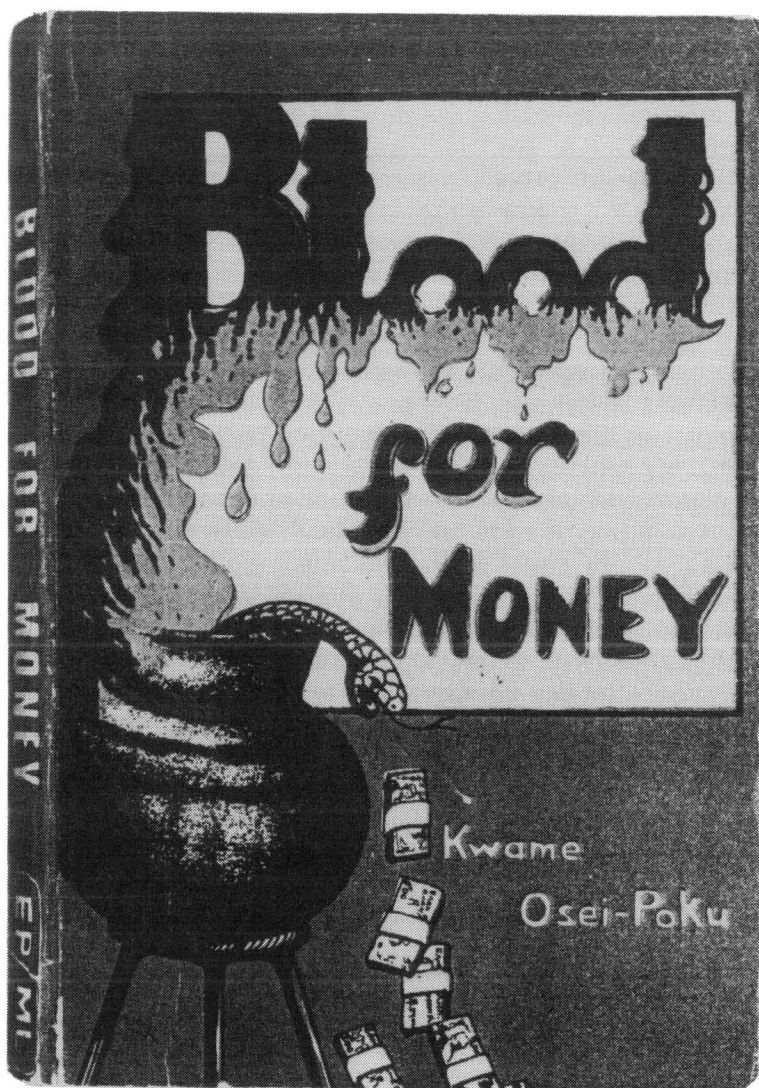
Kwame Osei-Poku's *Blood for Money* is described on its back cover as "an attempt at exposing to the reader the problems and troubles that result from the craze for quick money" (n. pag.). The protagonist, Diawuo, takes "a short cut to riches. Though very rich, he realizes that comparatively, he was happier as a poor man than as a rich man" (n. pag.). Here we find a man who contrasts Bediako in that he turns to *juju* (rather than Christianity) for his supply of money. As in the opening of *Bediako the Adventurer*, where three youths used an insinuation about "one of those men" to air their suspicions about a specific type of accumulation, the synopsis on the back cover of *Blood for Money* contains contemporary euphemisms about individuals who have chosen illicit forms of wealth. The phrases "the craze for quick money" and "a short cut to riches" lack specificity, but this very vagueness implies that they contain allusions to other popular narratives. Loaded with dynamic potential meanings, these euphemisms presuppose the reader's familiarity with the plots and resolutions of other satanic wealth stories, where the "craze for quick money" and the "short cut to riches" signify specific types of malpractice.

Narratives about the "short cut to riches" are also quoted visually on the front cover, where a cartoon portrays the ritual

items commonly associated with witchcraft, *juju* and satanic temptation: a cartoon calabash stands on a tripod and a snake emerges from it, spewing wads of Bank of Ghana notes onto the ground; blood-red liquid bubbles out of the calabash, flowing up to the title-word “Blood” (Plate 1). This image is polysemic. Like the euphemisms on the back cover, it resonates with numerous intertextual allusions to ritual objects, beliefs and ceremonies. Ghanaian readers might recognize the calabash and tripod as a parodic representation of *nyame-dua* (“God’s tree”), described by Tom McCaskie as the “ubiquitous household shrine, dedicated to *onyame*” in precolonial Ashanti, made from the forked branch of a tree and supporting a vessel into which ritual offerings are placed (*State and Society* 110-11). The snake signifies a whole complex of meanings, including (in)fertility, illicit wealth, the form taken by Satan and by witches (see Meyer 300). The Bank of Ghana notes which the snake vomits, neatly packaged and bound, might be a symbolic representation of the public perception that uncontrolled money supplies are circulating among the wealthy few in Ghana; the bank notes might also contain a symbolic reference to the time, in the mid-1970s, when Acheampong’s government increased the money supply by eighty per cent and appeared to be “printing money at whim” (Robertson 42). Some readers might immediately make the image cohere as a totality by positioning it within a manichean Christian discourse, for since the first missionaries arrived in Ghana, many of the ritual objects associated with *juju* have been regarded as real and translated as “satanic” (See Meyer, *Translating the Devil*).

Gathered together in a single, saturated image, these symbols depend upon the reader’s prior knowledge to make them cohere. Archaic references have been reconfigured into a resonant contemporary image of illicit wealth in Ghana. However, it is important to emphasize that the cartooning style and garish colours on the cover suggest that these references also are being parodied. The cover is ambivalent: it seems simultaneously to endorse *and* debunk its references by representing “blood for money” narratives in the form of a sensational cartoon.

On the first page of *Blood for Money*, Diawuo (whose name translates as “murderer”) is shown entering into a diabolical pact



with the shrine priest Abakah in order to gain immense wealth. A false friend has tempted him with the promise of a "short cut" to personal riches, and Diawuo makes the conscious decision to sacrifice one of his wives. In conformity with the moral economy of other "blood for money" narratives, he is tortured by terrible dreams and mental anguish until his suicide at the end of the novel.

Birgit Meyer (1995) suggests that this resilient template symbolizes the contradictions between individual accumulation and "pre-capitalist ethics" in Ghana (249). In her discussion of popular Pentecostal stories about the Devil and money in south-eastern areas of Ghana, Meyer distinguishes between individualistic consumption and the "reversion to a pre-capitalist ethics which emphasises family and solidarity" (305). Acquisitive individualism, she argues, is represented in the narratives as a by-product of "life-destructive" capitalist transactions, which are, in turn, conceptualized as "evil" or "satanic" (305). In the context of popular pentecostalism, where God and Satan are perceived to be real presences in an individual's daily life, poverty and wealth "can be either godly or satanic," conceptualized differently depending upon people's interpretations of the sources and uses of an individual's wealth (307). Secret stockpiles of cash, if they are used individualistically to purchase status symbols instead of being redistributed within the extended family, are represented as satanic in these "blood for money" narratives: such "individualism and indifference towards the extended family, though adequate in the context of a capitalist economy, threaten . . . extended family relations" (304-05).

In communities where personal savings are vital for status-enhancing investments, individuals on low incomes experience constant pressure on their resources from their extended families. Meyer argues that the tensions between the desire for wealth and the dispersal of money through the family generate compelling stories in which people can express frustrations about their social obligations by reading about the symbolic killing of close family members; simultaneously, they can reaffirm the moral superiority of a community-centred order by witnessing the agony and downfall of the tempted individual. Attractive as it may

be to the low-paid “youngman” who resents the financial demands of his extended family, unearned wealth thus is shown to extract too great a price from the individual.

From the outset of *Blood for Money*, Osei-Poku problematizes the morality of these “blood for money” templates. Diawuo’s “evil” wealth does not unequivocally jeopardize the future of his community. Instead, his life-destructive ritual endows him with the resources to make “social investments” in his family and hometown. Significantly, after killing his second wife, Diawuo’s very first public gesture as a newly rich man is to make a substantial donation at the funeral of his victim (*Blood* 132). He is “socializing” his illicit wealth in the manner of a contemporary Big Man, redistributing his resources within Kyeiwaa’s family and attempting to gain status amongst the recipients of his wealth. Witnesses to Diawuo’s rapid rise to prosperity also hail him as a legitimate Big Man. Having donated millions of cedis towards community projects in his hometown, his dream of social recognition is realized, for he is carried through his village on the shoulders of young men, passing through streets lined with cheering villagers (221).

In the process of becoming a Big Man, Diawuo is transformed into a moral “broker”: he bridges the potential dichotomy between individual accumulation and long-term community values by re-channelling his money, changing cash acquired through equivocal transactions into investments which preserve the stability of his community. Even though the source of Diawuo’s wealth is represented as “evil,” the author is not presenting his investments as anti-social. The *process* whereby diabolical money is converted into social capital is morally ambivalent, and the protagonist’s hoard of money is not set in a neat opposition to the “pre-capitalist” ethics of his community, as Meyer claims for other Ghanaian blood-money narratives.

The process whereby Diawuo’s money is legitimized distinguishes popular narratives about men gaining illicit wealth from those about women. Women in Ghana have access to different, less public social investment opportunities than men, and perhaps it is the “hidden” nature of their wealth that generates negative, suspicious attitudes towards the source of their savings.

The fact that currently there is no female equivalent to the Big Man in Ghana implies that men can legitimize their wealth and status more easily than women.¹⁴ As we have seen, rich men can socialize their savings through community investments involving the acceptance of long-term responsibilities for the welfare of others: Big Men might sponsor the education of youths in their hometowns, take titles, fund social welfare projects and distribute consumer goods through their extended family networks. While women *can* make considerable donations to their communities and achieve formal status, the channels through which they legitimize their wealth tend to be less ceremonial, less related to public projects and, therefore, less likely to create an atmosphere of acceptance. As a result, stories about women's illicit wealth—epitomized by witchcraft accusations—are seldom ambivalent about the moral value of that wealth (see Comaroff, *Modernity*).

As in Amarteifio's novel, a complex and contradictory morality attaches to Diawuo's sudden influx of wealth. One need only compare Bediako's early "investments" with Diawuo's to see how the moral boundaries are blurred between the sources and uses of these men's different kinds of wealth. Although Bediako has earned his cash through honest labor as a salaried shop assistant, when he invests it in the good-time girl he corrupts his earnings, the money has been used to fuel his lust and purchase Feli's sexual favors. When the good-time girl gets her hands on the hero's money it is transformed as a resource—or "re-sourced"—for it ought to have been reserved for transactions that would benefit his extended family. Diawuo, on the other hand, has acquired his wealth in a malevolent way by sacrificing his wife and committing himself to the on-going elimination of close family members. However, the manner in which he spends his satanic wealth partially "re-sources" it, for he invests it wisely in long-term business ventures and plans to "invest it in his children to ensure a prosperous future for them and he would generously give to the poor so as to become popular" (*Blood* 83).

Diawuo is a hard-working individual who has struggled to make ends meet but has been propelled towards evil by the economic situation in Ghana. His ambition is to command re-

spect in his community, and yet his earnings slip away from him constantly; in addition, his poverty renders him submissive to his wealthy wife, Kyeiwaa. What finally persuades Diawuo to consult the shrine priest is his friend Ansah's comment on the gender dimension to his poverty: "Get it straight from me that any financial assistance from a woman is bad. You definitely mortgage your freedom and subordinate your rights and interests to hers" (62). Immense wealth brings dignity and masculinity, for Diawuo has noticed that Ansah's wives call him "my lord" and obey his commands (69). Emasculated by poverty, he is "compelled by circumstances much beyond his control" to sacrifice Kyeiwaa at Katatwo shrine (1); "Lord forgive my sin," he prays in an ironic appeal to God immediately after the ritual, "for I've been compelled to do so. It is not my fault but that of poverty and degradation" (106). The omniscient narrator does not comment on the flawed logic of this compulsion: instead, readers are reminded, "Diawuo knew that whereas poor people had only hopes, the rich . . . could undertake some meaningful projects so that they could leave an indelible mark before they died" (83). The narrator exposes a paradox in contemporary Ghana, where corruption and speculation—symbolized here as diabolical wealth—appear to provide the *only* means of achieving the social ideal to leave behind a "name" in one's community.

Blood for Money is morally ambivalent, for despite the heroic status Diawuo gains in his community, illicit wealth is by no means promoted. After Kyeiwaa has been killed, warnings are spliced into every moment of the hero's financial success. Diawuo is tormented by nightmares, moral anguish, guilt and the repeated realization that, "I have taken the wrong decision . . . my presence on earth, *properly valued*, would be *worth more* than the money gained with all its attendant suffering" (134; emphasis added). Ostensibly, he has selected incorrectly from the parallel value systems described above and yet, as we have seen, these systems are intertwined within a single ideology linking money with social prestige.

Given its ambivalence, *Blood for Money* can be read as a targeted critique of the money-making opportunities available to ordinary men in present-day Ghana. Diawuo's detailed business strategies

and blood-money investments reveal the extent to which poor men's entrepreneurial abilities in Ghana are thwarted by their lack of capital. The informal sector workers who make up the text's society halt the plot repeatedly with stories about their struggles to survive.

A particular splinter in the moral body of the book is the life-story of Ansaah, the "false friend" who tempts Diawuo to visit the shrine priest. Honest and hard-working, he was a mechanic until malicious colleagues caused him to be sacked; pious but poor, he attended church—the 51st Disciples Church, no less—until the minister sexually assaulted his wife; at last, unemployed and without religious faith, he succumbed to temptation and visited Abakah at Katatwo shrine (27-39). These stories of men's frustrated potential serve as ironic comments on the economic optimism of the 1950s, when Nkrumah foresaw a nation "where every citizen has the fullest opportunities to develop and use his skills and talents" (qtd. in Robertson 39).

By generating this "blood for money" narrative and using it to explain the wealth of a *nouveau riche* man in the 1980s, Osei-Poku has found the means to express, explain and morally justify ordinary people's exclusion from money-making modes that require not "skills and talents," but political connections and foreign exchange. Wealth is symbolized as that which requires secret handshakes and human capital. Entrepreneurial empire-building and blood-money are inextricable in the novel, to such an extent that the Chief Priest's devotees belong to a secret association that is called "The Abakah Assisted Entrepreneurs Club" (*Blood* 197). The ironic implication here is that, if he is to acquire immense wealth, a man requires the "assistance" of a powerful official. Osei-Poku has thus transformed the "blood for money" templates that circulate around Christian groups in Ghana by leaving their central moral questions unresolved. In place of resolutions, he offers a sympathetic and often humorous account of the economic conditions "compelling" men into this kind of covenant.

Bediako the Adventurer and *Blood for Money* attach diverse values to money, most of which are based upon the activity of exchanging, or "socializing" cash. First, the wasteful or productive *uses*

to which money is put are vital considerations in the assessment of a character: as we have seen, the moral ambivalence of Diawuo stems from the social legitimacy of his investments, while Bediako's downfall is triggered by his "sinful" expenditures on a "peacock woman" (28). Second, secret hoards of money are not presented by these authors as being anti-social in themselves: what they symbolize depends upon the *intentions* of the hoarder, because the projects for which private savings are earmarked affect the moral evaluation of the money supply. For example, when readers of *Blood for Money* discover that Diawuo's first wife, Asoh, has been lying about her income and hiding her wealth from her husband to stop him from spending it, the omniscient narrator intervenes immediately to explain her intentions. Asoh's hoarding activities are not for selfish ends but for the sake of posterity: secretly she has purchased a plot of land in Kumasi with the intention of erecting a building for her children (24). Similarly, Diawuo intends to "leave a name behind," and this is presented as the sole—though misguided—motivation for his temptation into a blood-for-money covenant with Abakah (156).

The final, most important aspect of a character's moral value concerns the *social type* who does the spending. This area does not seem to have been explored in current publications on the subject of money symbolism. "Proverbial" character types, as I have argued elsewhere, are reinvented constantly in West African popular narratives and filled with moral meanings ("Redefining Mimicry"). The feminization of the term *kalabule* and its attachment to Ghanaian market women and unmarried young women in the 1970s and 1980s reveals the manner in which new character types are continually re-constructed from human raw materials, and then inserted into the economy: as Priebe has suggested, such figures function as explanatory devices, used as figures through whom people's financial hardships can be comprehended ("Popular Writing" 410).

In *Bediako the Adventurer* the moral evaluation of feminine types is illustrated by the way in which Feli, the "trollop," is blamed by the hero for causing his downfall into financial ruin: "The cause of all this is that baneful woman in my life—Feli," Bediako tells his audience of young men (100). When Bediako

transfers his wealth to the good-time girl instead of investing it in his household and matrilineage, he is succumbing to a popular, proverbial character type who has been circulating in West African narratives for decades, warnings radiating from her seductive exterior (Newell, "Petrified Masculinities"). While his good wife, Fosua, "had worked so hard to save for me" (*Bediako* 66), Feli wastes his money on imported commodities acquired for her personal use. "Now I was living with a woman who contributed nothing but spent a great deal of the money," *Bediako* complains (66). Similarly, in *Blood for Money* the spending habits of Diawuo's two wives establish their "types" and position them in a moral economy. Diawuo's first wife, Asoh, is "good and devoted" because, like Fosua, she financially supports her husband in times of difficulty and invests her savings in the family (8). Readers are warned against Kyeiwaa, on the other hand, because she comes from a moneyed family and hoards her own wealth: "because she was richer than Diawuo, she had her own schedule and could not be controlled by him" (84). Bridging the twenty year gap between the publication dates of these two novels is the persistent idea that a woman's moral worth can be evaluated by her expenditure, related always to its impact upon her husband's social stature.

The masculine figures in these two novels include the "fallen husband" and the "tempted man." Like the female characters, the sources of their money are mediated by their intentions for it and the social types into which they are cast. In both texts, ordinary men coming into possession of immense wealth are explored through the category of the Big Man, making them more complex and morally ambiguous than the female character types discussed above. In Amarteifio's novel, while suspicions are aired about this character type, the Big Man is retrieved as a legitimate owner of uncontrollable money supplies. In Osei-Poku's novel, however, written for a readership situated in a post-Acheampong society, far more suspicion is cast upon the Big Man's activities. However, the way in which Diawuo "re-sources" his money complicates simple assumptions about the corruption of wealthy men, for his social investments preserve the possibility that this type of man still might be retrieved as a social ideal.

The central points I have sought to emphasize in this analysis are, first, that not all wealth stems from negative or feminine sources in West African narratives about money, and, second, that not all excessively wealthy individuals are believed to have abandoned their communities in favour of self-interested accumulation. While the “commoner” protagonists of *Bediako the Adventurer* and *Blood for Money* take very different routes to Big Man status, both texts reveal that the good, amoral or evil “sources” of an individual’s wealth are not the only factors in the moral evaluation of a person’s worth to his or her community. An exclusive focus on the origins of money as *either* godly *or* satanic neglects the vital processes and activities of exchange: as Jonathan Parry points out, money is a transactional object, and the conversion of money into social (or anti-social) capital can signify different things, depending upon the type of exchange (“Moral Perils” 66).

In *Bediako the Adventurer* and *Blood for Money*, we can see how the single word “money” opens up a complex realm of moral evaluations in which money symbolism extends far beyond “good” or “bad” sources, and far beyond the stable “text-context” relationship attributed to popular fiction by Priebe. Karin Barber emphasizes that in African popular culture, money “functions as a powerful organizing symbol, exerting a magnetic force on a whole field of discourse about social values, achievements, aspirations, and relationships” (“Money, Self-Realization” 207). By studying two Ghanaian novels in detail and situating them in specific economic and political contexts, I have tried to show just how morally complex, dynamic and powerful that “organizing symbol” can be.¹⁵

NOTES

- ¹ See Assimeng, *Religion and Social Change*; Nugent, *Big Men*.
- ² See, for example, Ikiddeh, “The Character of Popular Fiction”; Ehling, “The Biafran War.”
- ³ Attention in this article will be confined to locally published Ghanaian novelists rather than to Ghanaian authors available in Europe and North America. International authors such as Kofi Awoonor, Asare Konadu, Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo are of course concerned with similar issues to the writers discussed here. An imbalance has emerged, however, from the ephemeral, local nature of the former

literature and the global, multinational status of the latter. Except for Ime Ikiddeh ("The Character of Popular Fiction") and Richard Priebe ("Popular Writing"), recent scholarship has tended to revolve around the international authors, many of whom are published in Heinemann's *African Writers Series*. It is essential that "metropolitan" literary scholars start to integrate narratives which have been produced on regional and national printing presses, for, as with African-language literatures, local African publications often presuppose an audience with a different range of narrative traditions, stylistic devices, interpretive conventions, preoccupations and expectations. When comprehensive studies of this local literature become available, it will be possible for scholars further to contextualize the literary themes, plots and techniques to be found in the Ghanaian novels available in international bookstores.

- 4 "Youngman" is a single word in Ghana referring to a group of men identifiable by their age (17-35), unmarried status, secondary education and relatively low financial position.
- 5 See Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl*; Akyeampong, *Alcohol, Social Conflict and the Struggle for Power*.
- 6 All subsequent references to *Bediako the Adventurer* will relate to the English translation, published in 1985.
- 7 This point should not be overemphasized, nor should privately accumulated wealth be seen to originate in the impact of a Western capitalist ideology. For centuries, West African traders have speculated by hoarding goods, or purchasing commodities in one region to be sold in areas of scarcity. What distinguishes the mid-1960s from previous decades is the scale of speculation and the public perception of it as a corrupt, individualistic activity depriving people of essential commodities.
- 8 Close parallels can be found between Ghanaian narratives containing money symbolism and Yoruba texts produced during the oil-boom years and subsequent oil-recessions in Nigeria. Karin Barber (1982) finds that in popular Yoruba theatre performances since the 1970s, solutions are proposed to the problem of ordinary workers' exclusion from the oil-rich sector of the economy. Political criticisms of corruption and nepotism in the country are "displaced sideways onto armed robbery and magical money" narratives, both of which are people's experienced or imagined "by-products of the petro-naira economy" (449; see Watts, "Oil as Money"). In their efforts to resolve the audience's experience of poverty in the midst of visible national wealth, the plays frequently promote a hard-work ethic, combining it with the Christian missionary principle that "one should be content with one's lot" (448). These popular performances are thoroughly ambivalent: on the one hand, plots partially reject the cultural legitimacy of the cash-rich millionaire by attributing his or her wealth to black magic or criminal activities; on the other hand, the plays express ambitions for the Big Man's social status, which is valued immensely in Nigeria. The plays thus manifest a great *desire* for "boundless" wealth, but they also portray the dubious means by which unearned, "baseless fortunes" are gained. As in the Ghanaian popular novels I have chosen to discuss, in the plays studied by Barber, suspicion is introduced into the means by which "ordinary" individuals have obtained their immense fortunes.
- 9 See Clark, *Onions are my Husband*; Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl*.
- 10 See Barber and Ogundijo, *Yoruba Popular Theatre*; Ekejiuba, "Currency Instability"; Meyer, *Translating the Devil*.
- 11 See Nugent, *Big Men*; Arhin, "Monetization."
- 12 See Barber, "Money, Self-Realization and the Person"; Manuh, "Changes in Marriage."
- 13 See, for example, Uzorma, *Occult Grand Master*; Eni, *Delivered from the Powers*.

- ¹⁴ See Oduyoye, *The Asante Woman*; Nugent, *Big Men*.
- ¹⁵ I should like to thank Paul Nugent and Karin Barber for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

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