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An Anthropology of Common Ground

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QUALIFYING HERITAGE THROUGH POSTCOLONIAL MOMENTS

POSTCOLONIAL MOMENTS: NURTURING CONTINGENT SYMMETRY

‘WITH THE EXHIBITION IN THE MAIN BUILDING THE AIM WAS TO SHOW similarities as well as differences between the African enslaved workers and the Danish masters, and this was done by telling stories about the working and leisure life of both parties at the plantation.’¹

Written jointly by most of the Danes involved in the Frederiksgave project, this quote informs us of the thoughts behind the exhibition set up in the newly reconstructed buildings. It shows how a dual figure of similarity and difference was used for structuring the exhibition at the Frederiksgave site. Moving on from the previous chapters’ exploration of the project design, architectural drawings, tools, materials and values, I now turn to the life of the ‘finished’ exhibition and plantation site of Frederiksgave.

Here I will discuss the kind of comparative work entailed in the Frederiksgave project – referred to as a cultural encounter and a common past – by drawing on Verran’s notion of ‘postcolonial moments’.² This notion, which I bring to bear generally on common heritage work, first appeared in her book on Yoruba numbers in Nigeria,³ and was further explored in an article on different firing strategies in the Australian bush, where Verran analyses the collaboration between landowning Aboriginals and scientists to suggest that postcolonialism is about making differences realisable and not seeing futures as mere repetitions of pasts.⁴ What

interests me here is that thinking about the postcolonial in this way suggests that recognition of differences can allow for a new way of understanding symmetry as a dynamic *quality*, rather than a more or less stable relation between given entities. This is important because it was exactly this kind of dynamic approach that I have suggested was present but not always prioritised in the Frederiksgave project, by its construing symmetry as a relation between essentialised apolitical entities, and displaying this as a cultural encounter between distinct groups 'having' a common history.

As Verran shows in her article, the strategies of the two groups with whom she worked, Aborigines and scientists, differ profoundly. This became clear in practical, unpredictable encounters and has, over the years, often caused conflicts and misunderstandings. However, even in such a difficult and almost impossible situation, possibilities for dialogue and seizing 'postcolonial moments' still arise. Paraphrasing Stuart Hall, Verran sees these moments as 'occasions for theorising, for telling differences and sameness in new ways'.⁵ This is not the postcolonialism conveyed, for instance, in the classic *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001) by Frantz Fanon, where the formerly oppressed, via their newly gained voice, reverse the relations by proactively emphasising their differences from former oppressing colonisers. At stake here is not an epochal or genealogical notion of postcolonialism where subalterns' possibilities of finally speaking back are the issue. Neither is it simply a matter of having moved beyond colonial asymmetry, as the Frederiksgave project makers seemingly saw it, and which caused them to design their project, in spite of its relation to the precarious theme of slavery, as a neutral cultural encounter and a matter of uncovering a common and given history. A postcolonial moment is not about 'retrieving a lost purity by overthrowing and uprooting an alien knowledge tradition'.⁶ Reversal of roles is not the issue. Instead, a postcolonial moment provides an analytical opportunity for reconfiguring particular fields and interrupting existing orthodoxies in open-ended ways. More generally, it is a matter of realising that differences are not already given as properties of distinct entities or parties, but are something that we constantly make⁷ in agreeing to speak.⁸ To employ this approach in heritage work, however, takes an effort and a measure of courage.

The attempt to make differences (between, say, ideas about events in the

past) realisable in a shared here and now implies that they are not delineated once and for all, nor externally related to each other across borders of predefined entities. Such an understanding implies that rather than looking at, comparing or collecting various things (in the plural) as anthropologists have often done, things are to be understood as comparisons in themselves.⁹ Things as they appear to us are thus always made up of relationships to what they are not, i.e. what a thing is different from and what it compares with in and of itself. In other words, what appears as a thing – for instance, a heritage site – always also entails what it is not, because other possible comparative relations exist that would make it appear differently. The point here is that sameness has to be seen as already always implying difference. Sameness in a postcolonial moment is an effect, and thus about a symmetry established by the very fact that all parties contribute to and are produced in the ongoing making of a (differentiated) here-and-now (which can – and does – of course imply inequalities). Postcolonialism, in Verran's words, is about enabling 'difference to be collectively enacted'.¹⁰ In my words, it entails allowing for a commonness in heritage work that does not imply the levelling of difference through the implicit mobilisation of certain logics of sameness posited at the outset.

In the previous chapters, many situations in which the Frederiksgave site emerged as 'common heritage' were explored in great detail. These situations were of various kinds, and the presence of awkwardness and tension was often explicit; awkwardness has thus been a faithful companion in analysing what went on during the reconstruction, where archaeologists, archives, architects, universal aspirations, forks, trees, drawings, rulers and whitewash (among many other agents) kept encountering one another and thereby bringing Frederiksgave to life. So far, my focus has been mainly on the emergence of Frederiksgave as a common heritage site during the phases of design and reconstruction. Accordingly, I have primarily looked at the Frederiksgave project as articulated and practised by the project makers, among whom the Danish planners have taken centre stage, because they were for the most part the ones most concerned with the heritage work and also those to whom the (universal) worth of Frederiksgave was most apparent. In this chapter – which is also a conclusion in the sense that it reflects back on the previous chapters – I broaden the scope

a little to focus on moments of fieldwork that mocked the project planners' vision of Frederiksgave as an object of universal nature, common interest and aligned value. Using the notion of postcolonial moments, I take the opportunity to more actively propose possible alternative ways of qualifying heritage work latent within the project. The idea, then, is at once to reflect on what has gone on so far, and to do so by engaging with still more relations. Throughout the chapter, I will raise a number of questions that arise from my field, not necessarily with the aim of answering them, but so as to offer suggestions as worked examples of alternative ways of going forward. It is in doing this that I also begin to modestly propose and activate the potential of an ethnographically informed generative critique of common heritage work.

First, I want to show that the project's main and explicit idea of turning the Frederiksgave site into a common heritage site tended to background other issues that kept popping up during fieldwork. I thus want to explore some of the other concerns that were also generated in the mocking situations of the reconstruction project, the 'side-effects' as they were tellingly often termed by the project planners of the Common Heritage Project. As also discussed in Chapter One, I see this focus on mockery and unexpected outcomes as an interesting way to contribute to an anthropology of heritage, because it allows us to explore heritage as a fundamentally emergent and collective enterprise, and not as the result of compromises between given parties, hegemonies, technical solutions or degrees of historical accuracy.

Second, and accordingly, I want to develop a vocabulary that might give us tools to understand encounters in common heritage projects that sidestep the language of pre-given entities meeting, subsuming each other, or even colliding, as was characteristic of the notion of cultural encounters analysed in Chapter Two. Instead we can make better use of the encounters as privileged sites of analysis, as generative moments where entities (such as pasts, people and history, as well as heritage sites) are *produced* as outcomes. This might pave the way for a positive critique of common heritage, resting on creative invention rather than deconstruction, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Third, and in direct consequence, I want to suggest that we can learn something very important for further common heritage projects by staying with these

awkward moments, instead of attempting to resolve them to arrive at heritage in the singular. This was one of the reasons why I detailed the complex history of fetish in relation to Frederiksgave in Chapter Four. Nurturing postcolonial moments will help with such ambitions, and for this reason, I see them as vital to my overall aim of qualifying heritage and developing an anthropology of common ground. This lens gives us an opportunity to work creatively and by way of improvisation with common heritage, instead of (as was a dominant feature in the plans for the Frederiksgave project) to dismiss, ignore and explain away awkwardness, or moments that challenged the initial design, purpose and story of the project. The actual process of collaborative common heritage making does not allow for such genteel and transcendent ideas of common heritage as given, and everything else as deviation.

In the following, I will discuss the ideas of sameness and difference expressed between Ghanaians and Danes in the project, but which could have been more actively brought to the fore. I ask several questions. How are the sameness and differences that the people from the National Museum mentioned to be understood? How might the notion of contingent symmetries come into play when, clearly, the relativist idea of cultural encounters did not do away with claims to universalism? In what ways could moments of tension in the course of the life of the Frederiksgave project perhaps have been developed more fruitfully and courageously, and have allowed for the continued existence of different perspectives and interests produced and emerging in the course of the project? In other words, what might heritage be and become when seen as a product of encounters in a postcolonial moment as I have described it? In order to address these questions, let us first take a closer look at some of the posters exhibited at the site.

POSITING SAMENESS AND DIFFERENCE: EXHIBITING LIFE IN COMMON?

In one of the three rooms in the main building are exhibited an old writing desk holding a goose quill, along with two small crocks for ink and sand, and a copy of a letter from one of the expatriate Danes. A display case on the floor



FIG. 5.1 Part of the exhibition in the main building, 2007, Sesemi, Ghana.

contains, among other things, an almost full-size gun of the 1800s. Three display cases contain objects and text related to the theme ‘Work’, as is stated in slightly bigger font on one of the posters.

The case introducing ‘Work’ also displays a copy of a hoe and a machete from the 1830s-40s. Under the heading, it states the following:

The work conducted by Danes and enslaved plantation workers differed considerably. The enslaved workers on Frederiksgave worked for the plantation owner from 6 to 10 a.m. and from 2 to 5 p.m. four days a week. The rest of the week they cultivated allotted plots of land for their own subsistence. The Danish officials worked from 8 to 12 a.m. and from 2 to 5 p.m. six days a week, mainly writing and copying administrative documents.¹¹

Clearly, the text focuses on the differences between ‘Danes’ and ‘enslaved plantation workers’, all the while implicitly comparing the work schedule of both parties. It is a comparison *between* two given entities – a plural perspective – and consistent with the relativist stance discussed in Chapter Two. Another poster

in the opposite room is called ‘Leisure time’, and focuses on the similarities between ‘the local people’ and ‘the Danes’:

Although the daily work tasks differed considerably between the local people on the Gold Coast and the Danes, many of the leisure activities were similar. Apart from sleeping and personal hygiene, time was often spent together drinking, eating, smoking, and playing various games. The slaves liked to perform music and dance, occasionally with the Danes as an audience. The Danish officials spent time reading books from a small library at Christiansborg.¹²

Under the text, various artefacts, such as games, miniatures of both a bed and a straw mat used as a mattress, and musical instruments are exhibited, along with accompanying texts informing the visitor about the different lives of the Danes and the local people at the site. For example, it is stated that

Most of the Danish authors writing accounts from the Gold Coast praised the cleanliness and hygiene of the people on the Gold Coast, in contrast to the European habits of merely stripwashing oneself and the wide use of perfume.¹³

Overall, the posters in the exhibition provide information on the differences and similarities between Danes and the people of the Gold Coast: they were all humans, yet they slept on different beds; they all worked, even if different hours and with different working tools; they all drank, albeit different alcohol; and they all played, even if different games. As stated in the introductory quote from the article written by many of the Danes involved in the project, this dual figure of differences and sameness runs intentionally through the exhibition. The lives of the Danes and slaves or local people on the Gold Coast are sharply separated, though their similar and common human activities are also stressed. At first glance, then, the exhibition might be seen as presenting symmetric relations between the two parties. But how are we to understand these relations when looking through a lens of postcolonialism in Verran’s sense? What I suggest

is that by taking their point of departure in two groups – Danes and enslaved workers – ‘symmetry’ is presented as given rather than contingent. People are reduced to data in an already established system, rather as in the Linnean system discussed in Chapter Two. The posters exhibit two already given groups, meeting every now and then in what was characterised as a cultural encounter.

If we recall Figure 4.3, the illustration depicting Danish and French men in uniforms and the lightly dressed female black waitresses, we will recognise a similar non-meeting within the same frame. In a sense, the illustration almost becomes a caricature of the parallel lives of both parties; one (ob-)serving the other. The ‘black’ waitresses and the ‘white’ men remain separated, living different lives even in encounters such as that enjoyable moment – just as they do on the posters exhibited at the Common Heritage Site. What I suggest here is that sameness and differences are enclosed within parallel lives. This is not necessarily a matter of a given (‘racial’) hierarchy. As we saw from the information about personal hygiene, the roles could be reversed so that the colonial Danes appear foreign to Danes today. Here one could perhaps talk of a reversed colonialism whereby visitors can learn that the Danes/Europeans were not as clean (and hence, one might add, civilised) as the Africans, who took proper care of their bodies. This rather specific and intimate information about hygiene might be surprising to visitors: either you are left wondering quite why this intimate information was chosen as a theme for a poster, or your ideas about who has traditionally been associated with the ‘civilised’ virtue of cleanliness are reversed. Maybe the choice to exhibit this subject was made for pragmatic reasons. Following a request from the former Director of the National Museum to the Danish Governor on the African Coast, everyday objects including hygienic artefacts were collected and sent to the newly opened ethnographic museum in Copenhagen in the 1830s-40s. These objects are now kept in storage rooms at the National Museum of Denmark. These old collected items could therefore function as templates for copies to be made in Ghana for the Frederiksgave exhibition. Maybe the project planners found this information interesting to communicate, particularly because it followed the cultural relativist idea of separating the two groups while evading clear-cut hierarchisation. However, in my view, by positing the two groups populating Frederiksgave when it functioned

as given entities, the posters occasion mere description, rather than allowing the encounters between the Danes and the Africans to effect a meeting of the two parties; in other words, in this case the exhibition does not seize the opportunity to nurture a postcolonial moment in Verran's understanding. Differences and sameness were confirmed as given and stable by being posited.

Of course, a setting with slaves and masters is already, from the start, sharply divided, and it might appear inappropriate to highlight any possibility of symmetry. However, a focus on interaction that may have blurred the picture, thereby explicitly giving rise to frictional situations, has been left out of the exhibition, and this to me amounts to a subtle form of colonising, in that the parties are already assigned unchangeable roles in the so-called cultural encounter – i.e. as mere data in an already given system. In this light, one might say that recognition of contingency is a precondition of symmetry – of being allowed to *become* a part of the shared past, thereby contributing to its production instead of merely filling it out – for both parties. Thus, rather than a contingent symmetry, the exhibition communicates a universal history entailing a given relation – sometimes hierarchical (in unexpected ways), sometimes not – made up of parallel lives from the point of view of invisible authors. This universal history informs visitors about the distinct lives of a homogeneous group of Danes and a homogeneous group of local people from the Gold Coast, who happened to be engaged on the same piece of land.

So what could have been done to nurture a generative perspective on both the present and the past? How might the exhibition have been designed so as to show the continuous and always incomplete production of entities such as Danes and local people – with whatever hierarchies exist between or among them at any point in time? How could the symmetry, understood not as a matter of equal representation of given positions but as a shared and ongoing activity of *producing* entities (and their pasts and futures), have aided the making of a much sought-after commonness of the past?

One artefact that could have pointed to some sort of awkward interaction, where the roles of people were not already charted or colonised by a universal story, was a whip. Exhibiting such an artefact at the site was briefly debated when planning the exhibition. The Ghanaian coordinator suggested that a whip

should form part of the exhibition. According to the Danish coordinator with whom he communicated, he argued that the overseer working on the plantation might have used a whip to force the enslaved plantation workers to work. But the Danish historian was opposed to the idea, because there were no signs either in the archives or from the excavations that such a tool had actually been used at the plantation. Records show that whips were used in the sugar plantations of the former Danish West Indies (today's US Virgin Islands). But plantations in Ghana, the Danish historian argued, were different from the plantations on the Caribbean islands. Importantly, to the Danish historian it was a question of historical accuracy and evidence, rather than an attempt at repressing the 'Danish evil' of the past. As discussed in Chapter One, the project planners were well aware that the plantation in Ghana entailed a 'dark heritage' of using enslaved workers, but while not shying away from addressing this, they wanted to do so in accordance with what they perceived to be historically accurate data. In this light the whip, according to the historian, was simply not accurate data in the system of History. However, this appeal to historical accuracy was interestingly balanced with a relativist view of history. Commenting on the suggestion that the whip be displayed, he said, 'the more they [Ghanaians, personified by the Ghanaian coordinator] take ownership, the better [...] it is their history, and they have the right to that [...]. One cannot own the history'. Again, we see an interesting mix of universal and relativist ideas. Having said this, the historian also expressed an awareness of the financial issues involved, since tourism in Ghana is a huge sector, attracting many African Americans to visit the forts along the coast and other sites related to the transatlantic slave trade. These potential tourists might be more interested in visiting a place that was more in line with what they expected and which entailed a strong symbol of oppression, such as the whip. Thus, economic factors might have been among the Ghanaian coordinator's concerns when he suggested exhibiting a whip. But before exploring these factors, it is useful to return to the dual figure communicated in the exhibition.

In the historian's statement, we see an implicit separation between 'their history' and 'our history'. Again, these two histories are presented as running parallel to each other, rather than meeting and thereby jointly contributing to a symmetrical making of the shared past. Such a symmetry, according to Verran,

is based on ‘infra-sameness’ rather than ‘meta-sameness’ – that is, a sameness that is internal to the things related and therefore also structured according to the particular encounter, rather than based on a third and distant meta-point of view from where one can observe the sameness of two given entities. With the vocabulary of infra-sameness, Verran gives a name to the possibilities for creating encounters built on ‘a sameness that is good enough merely for a few here-and-nows’.¹⁴ She thereby pays attention to provisional encounters of ‘infra-sameness’. At issue here is a ‘modest symmetry’,¹⁵ practised in the joints of the concrete. In the case of the Frederiksgave project, to focus on such modest symmetry is not to make the irresponsible claim that the enslaved workers at Frederiksgave had opportunities equal to those of their Danish masters, and that this should be reflected in the exhibition. But it is to claim that one way of practising common heritage work in an exhibition could be to let the possibility of violent oppression remain a live issue. Rather than the exhibition universally settling on the depiction of specific kinds of oppression on the plantation, a ‘small’ agreement and/or acknowledgement of oppression could have been nurtured in (modest) here-and-nows. Might one have exhibited a whip so as to nurture such an uncolonised moment?

More specifically, in terms of what the exhibition could have displayed to nurture a modest symmetrical commonness, one could imagine it explicitly communicating that Frederiksgave could be the same as *and* different from a West Indian plantation; that the whip might *and* might not have been used at the Frederiksgave site. This would replace an appeal to historical records as evidence (or, indeed, to ‘their history’ as an alternative version). The disagreement as to whether Frederiksgave should display a whip was, in my eyes, a productive opportunity to engage differences in collaborative heritage work. The question could have remained unsettled, but instead the ‘solution’ was to not exhibit a whip in the exhibition, since no historical sources documented the use of such an instrument at Frederiksgave. In this way, the possibility of connecting Frederiksgave with the transatlantic slave trade – and potentially attracting tourists interested in this history – was backgrounded by way of an appeal to historical evidence. As we saw in Chapters One and Three, accuracy was an aspiration; it was about measuring lengths, widths and heights that fitted

precisely with the numbers on the ruler. Like finding the right card among a pile of other cards, there seemed to be only one possibility in the exhibition's communication: to determine the 'true story' (as found mainly in archives, excavated objects and the ruin). And, like free verbal invocations, the posters exhibited had to refer to and represent that story through materials and texts.

At other times, it was the Ghanaian coordinator's ideas that were communicated in the exhibition; for instance, the word 'slaves' was changed to the less essentialising 'enslaved workers' on most of the text displayed. I suggest that the question of whether the enslaved workers at the Frederiksgave plantation shared the same harsh conditions (being humiliated and flogged with whips) as the enslaved Africans in the Caribbean can be seen as part of a more general aspiration existing in Ghana to call upon the African Diaspora and unite all Africans – an aspiration that was impeded by the refusal to exhibit a whip. Even though I never heard the Ghanaian coordinator mention the plight of the African Diaspora, he nevertheless dedicated his PhD thesis about the Frederiksgave plantation to these and other enslaved people. In its preface, he states:

This work is dedicated to the memory of the enslaved Men, Women and Children whose history is the subject matter of this study and to the millions who were uprooted and transplanted in the enslaved world of the African Diaspora.¹⁶

Although it was not explicit, the planners of the exhibition in Denmark had no doubt that, in addition to commemorating the once enslaved people of Ghana, the transnational African Diaspora was somehow present in the setting up of the exhibition. The Danish historian told me that early on in the project he had discussed with the Ghanaian archaeologist and coordinator whether slavery on Danish plantations in Africa could be understood as analogous to slavery in the Caribbean – an issue they seemingly did not completely agree upon. As we shall see, fieldwork experiences point to this unsettled relation between the plantations and the larger issue of slavery.

During my periods of fieldwork, many festivals and ceremonies were held along the Ghanaian coast in support of the official Ghanaian agenda of inviting

the African Diaspora to Ghana. In a former Danish Fort in Keta, I saw a poster headed: 'Panafest. Emancipation day '07. Joseph Project. Theme: reuniting the African family'. The Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations had initiated the so-called 'Joseph Project' in 2003¹⁷ and made the poster for the 200-year celebrations of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Similarly, the fiftieth anniversary of Ghana's independence was celebrated in 2007, the same year the Frederiksgave exhibition was set up. Two officials from the Ministry explained to me that the biblical story of Joseph being sold by his brothers had been their source of inspiration for the project. They were now hoping for reconciliation between 'black brothers', as they expressed it while showing me photographs from one of the ceremonies at one of Ghana's large European-built castles. The project's official web page explains: 'The Joseph project is Ghana's invitation to the Diasporans to make the return journey, to reconnect with the land of their ancestors and their brothers and sisters in the homeland'.¹⁸ When I asked the officials to elaborate on this, I was told that the 'black brothers' nowadays arrived mainly as tourists from North America.

A group of young and well-educated Ghanaians working in the Ghanaian museum and heritage sector told me that this reconciliation between 'black brothers' often created very ambivalent feelings among the people involved.¹⁹ They told me of an incident in which some Ghanaians had laughed at crying African Americans commemorating their enslaved forefathers, and of another in which they themselves, as workers in one of the big castles, had felt marginalised because some of the African Americans behaved as if they owned the forts and castles along the coast, insisting on their right to visit them without paying entrance fees. But on the other hand, they added, the African Americans did bring a great deal of money into their economically poor country. These were indeed difficult situations. The explicit aim of uniting all Africans pointed to a postcolonialism that entailed other differences than those between European colonisers and African colonised, and which could not be grasped by seeing just two given groups.²⁰ But by talking about 'black brothers', the Joseph Project created a unity that distinguished itself from the rest of humanity, such as, for instance, the Europeans who had been deeply involved in the history they commemorated. As such, the Joseph Project continued a racial thinking that is far

from new.²¹ I would argue that the Joseph Project, part of which took place in the former Danish fort of Prindsensten in Keta, was not – at least not immediately – used as an occasion ‘for telling differences and samenesses in new ways.’²² Instead, its design repeated a racial representation.

Whatever the project ideal, the exhibition at the Common Heritage Site was set up against an international backdrop, communicating to more than a Danish and Ghanaian audience whose past was called common; inevitably, it was about more than two nations sharing a history that can then be represented accurately and controlled in an exhibition. The African Diaspora, and other nations, apparently also entered the picture, and were present in this particular shared past. All along, as we shall see in the following, the universalising ideas embedded in notions such as ‘common heritage’, and surfacing in ideas about a given history and about given groups in the Frederiksgave project, were challenged by words, perspectives and objects, making it all the more striking that the project planners maintained that there was *one* (common) story to tell. The world was intruding on our shared past in ways that the Common Heritage Project could not control, and which in my opinion could push heritage work more generally in interesting new directions.

NAMING HERITAGE: WORDS OF THE WORLD

While reconstructing the site with the right materials, the right doses and the right location, copious verbal utterances were exchanged between the people involved. Many of these utterances dealt with the history of the site, either in written form or in the form of people talking together – in old and present-day Danish, and English. Ga and Twi, the two local languages, were also naturally heard, but rarely, I was told, to refer to the history of the site. Nailed to the walls, roofs and floors, pages and pages of text were hung up and exhibited. Both inside and outside the newly reconstructed building, posters offered ‘An overview of the site’ and information about ‘Frederiksgave. The Royal Danish plantation on the Gold Coast’. And, under the heading ‘Maps’, both old and new maps located the site in time and space. As touched upon above, the posters communicated the lives of the ‘Danes and the enslaved plantation workers’ under

headings such as: ‘Work’, ‘Leisure time’, ‘Personal hygiene’, ‘Games’, ‘Locally made pottery’, ‘European tableware’, and others. And, in even greater detail, one could be informed about the plantation via a small folder that could either be downloaded from the Internet or, if in stock, purchased at the site.

All this written text, however, only seemed to be a small interruption in or temporary accumulation of information from all the talk that I overheard and participated in during my fieldwork. The Danish heritage workers and professionals, in particular, did a great deal of talking. Summaries and discussions of books, notes, materials, emails, laws, measures and talks with visitors and other people were considered collectively. Questions were posed, and answers ventured or left unsolved. Detailed information about what ‘the Danes’ and ‘the local people’ or ‘the enslaved workers’, as they were termed on the posters, had been drinking, eating, growing, playing, wearing and hunting was shared. Questions about why the Frederiksgave site had not turned into a successful plantation, how the slaves were treated and how often the Danish expatriate men visited the place were debated. Whether they had had an enamelled coffee pot to brew the new grown coffee, as a Danish historian visiting the site suggested from her knowledge of the Danish National Archives, was discussed. There was no limit to the level of detail and information explored by the professional heritage workers engaged in the project. But, as a common credo, all the professionals agreed that here, exactly here, was (the spot of) our common history; here it was possible to walk around in our forefather’s footsteps; here history unfolded. The discussions notwithstanding, all were convinced that Frederiksgave manifested the past in the shape of a former plantation of common interest. By just being there, we were all somehow *doing* the credo. But outside of the community of enthusiastic heritage professionals, not everyone praised the principle. The people living in Sesemi did not tell a story of the ‘Danes and the enslaved plantation workers’ – not at all, as I rather quickly came to understand. It seemed that for them the place evoked different footsteps to walk in and thereby made other histories emerge.

Early on in the project, people from the National Museum had bought a video camera because they were interested in documenting the reconstruction work at the site. No one had really used it, so during my first fieldwork in Ghana

I thought that I might give it a try. I filmed how the workers mixed the mortar, how they carried the stones on their heads and how they levelled the terrain for the new building. During the recording, we laughed at the awkwardness of the camera; we probably also laughed at my female presence at the male-dominated site, at my interest in the reconstruction process and my requests that the workers tell me exactly what they were doing in different situations. Maybe we also laughed at having to speak English, a language that none of us spoke as our mother tongue, and maybe the workers also felt embarrassed by being filmed in dirty work clothes. Finally, I found two young men from Sesemi working at the site who actually seemed to like being filmed. They posed in front of the camera, and when I asked them if they could tell me something about this place, I was surprised by their story. They told me that this place had been ‘a Fort’ and that ‘slaves had been kept here.’ They pointed to a viewpoint further up the hill and said that from there ‘they’ (the Danish owners) could see if ships were ready to buy slaves or not. If so, slaves were brought down to the coast, chained together in long rows in order to be ‘shipped over there.’ I was disconcerted. At the time, the planning of the reconstruction project had already been running for some years, and the Ghanaian archaeologists had made excavations in the nearby ‘slave village’ in the 1990s, with assistance from the men in the village, so I did not expect such a different story from the one I had heard at the National Museum in Denmark – especially not in the midst of this *common* project. In Denmark, the Danish coordinator had told me that, with the Common Heritage Project, the National Museum wanted to tell another story than the one richly offered at the forts and castles along the Ghanaian coastline. They wanted to tell ‘another chapter’ in Danish and Ghanaian history, as she framed it. This was a chapter about how Danes had experimented with plantations *in* Ghana, using slave labour. But the story that the two young men told me was exactly what the Danish coordinator termed ‘a prior chapter in history from before the time of the Frederiksgave plantation’; they were explicitly linking the Frederiksgave site to the transatlantic slave trade. In the video sequence, I stuttered that I had heard that the place had been used as a plantation. The two young men nodded politely and started working again; obviously they were not interested in my story, which therefore ended rather abruptly. The official story of the common

heritage site advocated by the project planners was silenced and seemingly irrelevant from the perspective of the project workers I filmed. This was yet another awkward situation that, like others, did not find a resting place but was left unresolved. The workers did not exactly object to my comment about the place as a plantation; they just let it hang in the air as my own concern. Later, I told the Ghanaian coordinator about the story I had heard from the two young men, but he shrugged it off, deploring the fact that the young men still told this false story. He told me that this story was an old myth they apparently kept telling about the place.

Over the years, I had wanted to discuss this issue of addressing the link that people might make between the Common Heritage Project and the wider and still precarious theme of slavery in Ghana, because it was clear from my fieldwork that this connection kept popping up. However, rather than address the issue directly, the Frederiksgave project planners seemed to trust history to eliminate stories that were not documented in the archival and historical sources, such as that of the Frederiksgave site playing a role in the transatlantic slave trade. As a result, the pressure to educate local guides from the village, as budgeted for early in the project, was increased; the Danish National Museum felt that something had to be done; action had to be taken. In order to stop these stories, the coordinator from the Danish National Museum reacted instantly. Her response was to insist that ‘we have to educate the guides’. But, for some reason, education of the local guides was never undertaken at the site. The Ghanaian partner who was in charge of this task seemed not to have found the time to do so; it did not seem to be a priority to him to align the knowledge of the guides with that found in the archival sources on which the Danish National Museum relied. Clearly, this caused frustration among the Danes at the museum, who occasionally received critical feedback from Danish visitors complaining that the guides communicated a ‘false story’ that did not resonate with the orthodox story displayed on the posters. Thus, from the point of view of the Frederiksgave project planners in Denmark, continuously dealing with ‘the lack of education of the local guides’ has turned into a problem of high priority, to be dealt with in potential future projects in Ghana. Accordingly, when considering new projects in Ghana, ‘capacity building’ has been suggested as an important task. In line

with the statement mentioned in the previous chapters, it was 'a helping hand' and 'the least we can do' in order to safeguard a common past.

Could the various and seemingly incommensurable stories at the site be captured in, or supported by, the notion of a postcolonial moment? Do they reflect a contingent symmetry? Do or can educational activities entail moments where infra-sameness can be reached? Verran writes that aspirations to postcolonial moments imply a challenge to universalisms and orthodoxies. They are moments where the people involved understand their own metaphysics, its limits and partiality, and thereby come to tolerate rather than eliminate other perspectives.²³ Insofar as the local people's story was understood as wrong by the project planners, and as something that could be remedied by education and capacity building, their strategies pointed to one exclusive understanding of the site. This was the understanding communicated through posters and artefacts at the site – a universal story with no sender, it seemed, except history itself speaking via the archival sources and the excavated ruin. Like the ruler, history was seen as an external set of criteria. Through meticulous studies in archives, and via excavated artefacts and rubble, history could keep the Frederiksgave site in check, and supposedly true to itself. Like the metric system, education appeared as another form of universal standardisation, or as another catechism to eradicate idols, like that developed by the Church. This time, standardisation and doctrine did not come from offices in Paris or Rome, but from the National Archives and the National Museum of Denmark, and from university departments and laboratories in Ghana and Denmark. The kind of community inclusion that these ideas about capacity building entail is thus a very particular one, namely an offer to the Ghanaian collaborators to become included in the community of educated wardens of history. So great, apparently, was most of the project planners' trust in history, that they could see no problem in invoking the viewpoint of singular historical truth as a place from which to speak and act.

But as I have shown through numerous fieldwork situations, history is never just external to its subject and to the here-and-now, even if the stakeholders constantly try to make it appear as such in their universalising claims. As we learned from the architect and his ruler, history was both mediated and created at the heritage site. I want to stress here that this is not just a normative statement

about history being contingent. Rather, the point is that it demands a certain perspective to make it appear as already given. It demands an effort to turn history and knowledge of it into natural entities. The point is that orthodoxies are constantly challenged in the here-and-now, and we have, I will argue, every opportunity to make the most of these challenges in heritage work.

With regard to the contradictory stories articulated at the Frederiksgave site, nurturing a postcolonial moment could have meant exploring possibilities for infra-sameness. One could have taken 'slavery' as a potential point of infra-sameness that is 'good enough merely for a few here-and-nows'.²⁴ Although not settling on a particular idea about the destiny of the slaves, all still agreed that there had been slaves at the Frederiksgave plantation, and thus there was a modest conjunction, and a potential starting point.

Let us take a closer look at more of the words that were shared in and around the Frederiksgave heritage project. Some time after the National Museum of Denmark had left the Frederiksgave site to the management of a Board in 2007, a postcard of the site was produced (see also figure 3.4). Immediately, the photo on it caught my eye. The picture was not taken from what seemed to be most Danes' favourite spot, i.e. from the symmetrical axis. Perfectly facing the main building and restroom, several photos, including my own, had taken me to a spot which, without words or actions, seemed valued as central by the Danes. The new postcard also showed a picture of the main building and the restroom beside it, but it was taken from an oblique angle that allowed a slight perspectival depth to the buildings. The corner of the postcard reads 'Frederiksgave PLANTATION AND COMMON HERITAGE SITE DANISH FORT (SESEMI – ACCRA, GHANA)'. In addition to being a plantation, by using the word 'Fort', the postcard also connected the Frederiksgave plantation to the huge military buildings along Ghana's coast where slaves were kept in dungeons before being shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. By naming the site as a 'fort' and a 'plantation', it appeared as a multiple figure with two or more purposes. This twist in naming the site was emphasised in both a Ghanaian and Danish newspaper article on the site. After the inauguration of the Frederiksgave site, a Ghanaian newspaper wrote that if one wanted to visit Frederiksgave, one should 'ask for directions to the 'castle' as the local people call

the Danish settlement.²⁵ Although in Danish one differentiates between castles and forts, the latter being military edifices, this is not the case in Ghana, where the European edifices were designated as forts and castles interchangeably. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the term ‘fort’ also appeared in a recent newspaper article written by a Danish journalist,²⁶ a fact that caused the Danish coordinator of the Frederiksgave project to react and complain to the newspaper’s editor that the place had actually been a plantation, not a fort.

Again, we see the project planners maintain that there is only one history at play at Frederiksgave; what commonness entails is that there is one universal history communicated by the site. But as the postcard indicates, Frederiksgave seemed much more multifaceted when explored through fieldwork, with multiple histories and possibilities for their re-performance appearing. To the project planners, the transatlantic connection might have been false in the sense of *facticii*, a false idol, and therefore it caused them great frustration to hear from Danish visitors and myself that Frederiksgave was repeatedly linked to the transatlantic slave trade, and also commemorated as such when they were not around.

I have already mentioned the African Diaspora, and the Ghanaian interest in reconnecting with it via initiatives such as, for instance, the Joseph Project. Clearly, such relations were, on the official Ghanaian side, also thought of in terms of tourism and thereby economic gain, as seen in the coining of a Ministry for Tourism and Diasporan Relations. Attracting the African Diaspora was seen primarily as an economic asset, and thus a component of projects such as Frederiksgave – it was in this context, I suggest, that it made sense to exhibit a whip, and to call the Frederiksgave site a ‘fort’. As a Ghanaian professor, Atukwei Okai, Secretary-General of the Pan African Writers’ Association, poetically explains, the recognition and integration of the African Diaspora ‘is like a Baobab tree that goes in search of its roots in order to water them.’²⁷ One relevant question, then, is whether the African Diaspora, also seeking their common cultural heritage, would visit the Frederiksgave site if it was called a plantation rather than a fort. The African Diaspora seemed highly engaged in their forefathers’ stories, laying wreaths in the forts’ dungeons, and some even tracking down their DNA in order to locate which African region their ancestors had come from, as some African Americans told me at the former Danish fort

of Prindsensten in Keta. Would a story about a small plantation with Danish masters and African slaves *in* Ghana be of any interest to them? A place that even claimed to be different from plantations in the Caribbean, and where no whip was exhibited even though, together with chains, it was an archetypical symbol of the oppression and violence experienced by enslaved people in the Caribbean. Could the African Diaspora be interested and attracted to the site via a direct link in the form of a name: by using the term 'Fort' as suggested on the postcard, instead of 'Plantation'?

The huts that were later constructed to show the houses of the enslaved plantation workers were given different names too. In reports, applications and daily conversation they were called 'slave huts' among the Danes from the National Museum. I was therefore surprised when I later heard the workers from the village refer to them as 'summer huts'. Both the Ghanaian architect and Ghanaian archaeologist called them either 'traditional huts' or 'African huts', with a preference for the latter. This term was then adopted by the few Danes who were still slightly involved in the project after its inauguration in 2007. The word 'slaves' was apparently not appropriate with regard to the huts. The naming of the huts might point to difficulties in relating former residents (i.e. enslaved people) to the village. In Sesemi, the villagers most often called the Frederiksgave site 'the thing', 'this thing', 'Danish Fort', 'museum' or 'tourist attraction'. It should be mentioned that the expression 'the/this thing' is used very often in daily talk to signify words one does not know in English or has forgotten in the spoken moment. However, the persistent use of the phrase reminded me of Macdonald's description of how the Nazi heritage in Nuremberg, analysed in her book 'Difficult Heritage', was talked about among Nurembergers in a local newspaper in the 1950s as 'the *Erbstück* – 'heritage piece''.²⁸ On that occasion in the 1950s, almost no one mentioned the past purpose of the Nazi buildings, only the cost of the buildings and the potential savings gained by keeping them were discussed. In Sesemi, I suggest that calling the heritage site 'the thing' might also be a way of framing the site in an open and undecided manner that does not mention the past use of the building, unless via the name 'Fort', linking it to the transatlantic slave trade. In a recorded interview, one of the men from the village explained:

Villager: 'they [the project planners] give a little history concerning this thing [nodding in the direction of Frederiksgave]. [...] Until last Thursday [official inauguration of Frederiksgave], when that small booklet came, when I read it I saw that the whole history that we were told, is actually what goes on. But what is a little different is they say that [...] because they are going to make it as a tourist eh, excuse me [disturbed] when they start the whole project, the only thing that we have changed a little is that they say that [...] that place was used as a sl, eh, as a slave centre. It won't be fair [...] for the blacks to hear of that slave, this thing because when you are talking of slaves, our forefathers and then, ancestors, were used in that slave trade [...] when you just tell me that this place is a slave centre that means that, I know that ah, my foref, eh, my ancestors were taken to this site, so I wouldn't be happy [...] to go there and have a look. So they started saying that 'it's a plantation house', so we have to take it as a plantation house, that place was used as a farmhouse, they plant coffee and pineapple and so forth. So okay we were using that, but when we use the name slave attached to this thing they say 'no, no, no, no, no'.

Nathalia: who said no, no, no?

Villager: okay it was that from the beginning, [the Ghanaian archaeologist] is saying that, but later, when this project started, they were saying that it is not a slave this thing but ehm, it's a farmhouse [...] But [...] until the day this place was commissioned, then the Director to the National Museum of Denmark, [...] in his speech he just mentioned both, the farmhouse and then slave plantation.

Nathalia: you didn't like that?

Villager: no, no, you see, okay we got to know that then it's the real, that okay they used slaves here, and then both, the plantation farm and the slave work and then the this thing that they have done there [pause], then okay they bought twenty five slaves, men and women, to work for them. They got to, okay from the book they have written that some of the slaves too were sent to America [...] so that means that it's true that they used to buy slaves and this thing there. So that's from where we got that small

history. When people come then we just explain it to them that this is how the whole place start to being. [...] Anybody that comes [says it's a slave]. But this last year, when we were about to start this work then they started to change it saying that it's a farmhouse, you see?

Nathalia: yeah, but why did they change?

Villager: well, some say they don't want people to know that this place was used as a slave, you see? [...]

Nathalia: so they changed it into plantation, farmhouse

Villager: yes, yes, farmhouse, but after [...] I sit down and think 'ah, this thing, from the beginning they were saying it's a slave centre and then they have been buying slaves from here to America and so forth and then, why then are they saying it is a plantation house? You see?

Nathalia: yeah

Villager: so eh, I was worrying on that this thing, until last week, when the whole thing, when I saw it's in the booklet and then I saw; ah it's really both the farm plantation and then the slave work, so they just do the two. But what they say is that for the beginning, the first person that came here to start building this thing, the idea is to make a coffee plantation [...]. So after the plantation then they say that the Portuguese, Spanish, and so forth they started buying the slaves. So those here too got interest in the slave work, so they started buying the slaves you see'.

In this rather long and painful fragment, the crucial point seems to be the tensions regarding which stories the Frederiksgave site is supposed to tell and how to name the site. The villager ponders how to relate the site to slavery. An impression of not being the one who writes or tells the history of Frederiksgave is also conveyed. The history is something that he and his co-inhabitants are informed about in bits and pieces every now and then from authorities, including people from universities and national museums; it seems to be out of their hands. However, he clearly communicates that part of the history told at the site is 'not fair to the blacks'. According to him, the villagers did not like to be connected to slavery through blood, since it is painful and shows them in an unfavourable light. The villager seems to discuss how to refer to the place and

what to make of its changing names; perhaps preferring ‘a farmhouse,’ he also labels Frederiksgave as a plantation, and even as a slave plantation, dismissing the notion of slave centre, even though this name was about ‘in the beginning’. All the way through, it is a little unclear who ‘they’ are – the people who change the names, inform about what went on, and object to certain labels are both villagers (occasionally identified as an ‘I’), Ghanaian project workers and Danish heritage professionals. Surely, history does not speak for itself here, nor is anyone its given spokesperson.

‘Farmhouse’ seems to be a neutral word for the villager, since it connects the place with the present-day agricultural activities in the village. The word ‘slaves’, however, seems to my interlocutor to be best connected with the Americas. At the end of the quote, it sounds as if the place started out as a plantation for farming the surrounding land, but then the Portuguese and the Spanish (known in Ghana for being unscrupulous slave traders, even after the ban on the trade) started buying slaves to send to the Americas, thereby producing a market for them. Via these economic interests, the villager suggests, the Frederiksgave site became involved in the transatlantic slave trade – which according to Danish jurisdiction was illegal after 1802.²⁹ In this view, Frederiksgave is therefore both a plantation/farmhouse and a place used in the slave trade – an idea of Frederiksgave as a multipurpose object that was not mirrored in the booklet or on the posters produced by the National Museum in Denmark. In the perspective of the villager, ‘the thing’ matched the text written on the postcard mentioned above, being both a plantation and a fort, and possibly other things that they/ we might call it.

Macdonald points out how the city of Nuremberg is often associated by foreigners with its Nazi past.³⁰ For the present-day Nurembergers, such an image is reductionist and somehow understood as ‘unfair’. Some argue that it was the Nazi party that chose the city and not the other way around, and as such the city appears as victim rather than perpetrator of Nazi crimes. In Sesemi, the association of being descendants of victims of inhuman conditions of the past does not seem to be welcome. The pointing out of such a victimised position was understood as ‘unfair’. This was an attitude I encountered several times when talking to Ghanaians about slavery. The problem was not so much being

a descendant of forefathers who *had* slaves: the problem for the people I talked to was being identified as a descendant *of* those slaves. Where in Nuremberg the difficult past had led to the question over the years as to why Nuremberg was chosen as the place for the huge Nazi party rallies, this type of question was never addressed collectively in Sesemi. At stake in the cases of Nuremberg and the Frederiksgave site is a question about the specificity of both places in the wider history of Nazism and slavery, respectively. In the case of the Frederiksgave site, the project planners knew that the Europeans exploited the people from West Africa and shipped them to the 'New World', but right here, where the Common Heritage Project was located, it was a plantation – that was how *this particular* encounter was singularly structured and perceived to be in accordance with particular evidence from the archives and the excavation. In this perspective, the differences between the conditions of the enslaved workers in Ghana and the slaves shipped to America were given and verified by historical sources. However, as we have seen from the discussions about naming the heritage site above, other relations could have been seen to contribute to the complex production of the Frederiksgave site, whereby a contingent symmetry could have been explored. The point is that with regard to the Common Heritage Project, naming the place could thus be seen as growing out of heterogeneously structured encounters, rather than designating a universal given or a natural unity. Certainly, as I have amply demonstrated in the preceding chapters, it takes a very particular perspective to make Frederiksgave appear as such a natural entity. Accordingly, 'cross-cultural equivalence' (see Chapter Four) apparently seemed difficult to achieve. I rarely heard the people in the village term the place 'Frederiksgave', which was clearly most of the project planners' favourite name for it (which is why I have primarily used this term throughout the book). If the people in the village used this name, it always produced an awkward moment where the person in question hesitantly tried to pronounce the strange Danish sounds, smiling a bit, and with his or her eyes asking me to complete the word.

Most often, as described above, it was called 'the thing', 'the fort', 'tourist attraction', 'slave centre', 'Danish Fort' or 'museum' by the people in the area – including journalists. Initially, the place was officially called 'Frederiksgave

Plantation and Common Heritage Site' but a while after the site was handed over to a board in 2007, they suggested calling the place: 'Museum of Slavery and Plantation Lifeways' – a phrase I first encountered in 2007 in a short article in a Lonely Planet guidebook.³¹

This title suggested by the board caused a person from the National Museum, still granting money to Frederiksgave, to write an email asking the former Ghanaian coordinator, now a member and key person in the board, to add the name 'Frederiksgave' to the suggested title. The argument for this was that using the name 'Frederiksgave' was a way of ensuring the continuity of the project as it had hitherto been conceptualised, and furthermore it was the name known among Danes and likewise used in the Danish and Ghanaian media. 'Plantation', the only word surviving from the original name, could be seen as indirectly linking the site with slavery in the New World and, thereby, if we are to follow the villager quoted above, turning the place into both a farm and a place for dealing in slaves – the latter association attracting overseas tourists, all the while causing discomfort among the local villagers in Sesemi. 'Museum' might be seen as replacing 'heritage' and thereby following a trend in Ghana where 'these days every chief wants to have his own museum', as a person from the Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations explained to me. My point here is that for a common project, it has been difficult indeed to settle on a common name – significantly. the word 'common' has completely disappeared from the new title. A middleman's term, like the way the word 'fetish' emerged, has not (yet) been found, apart maybe from 'plantation', which also has its limitations, as described above. Maybe the term 'museum' is better suited to the job, being a neutral word that all can agree upon – maybe such words point to a shared interest that is good enough for a few-here-and-nows?

There are, then, important insights to be had from discussions about the name of the site. My suggestion here is that instead of striving to find the *right* name, the various namings of the site might be understood generatively as discussions that bring the site to life, and thus as an important unsettling point that could be embraced precisely to help us qualify cultural heritage at Frederiksgave. The different names (and the accommodation of different potential audiences) could be endorsed as expressions of precisely the contingent symmetry that prevails

in a postcolonial moment. Calling the site a ‘museum’ and leaving it like that might be far too imprecise, but maybe as a *starting point* such a general term might provide a space for encounters in the here-and-now between the site and various partners with different interests, wishes and understandings. What if the names were seen, not as end points, but as opportunities to explore sameness and difference in encounters across divides? Instead of saying that there are many ways to term the site (a relativistic point of view), or of appealing to particular historical evidence to settle on the most accurate name (a universalistic point of view), one might say that the site is nothing apart from the heterogeneous points of view. This would be contingent symmetry.

WARDENS OF HISTORY?

Certainly, these (awkward, tentative, shifting) ways of handling names all indicate that the Common Heritage Project was dealing with precarious matters that have not found a stable form except in an official name. We also sensed this precariousness in the previous chapter, where I described being taken out of the building by a frightened woman in order to escape the history of slavery. Early in my fieldwork in Ghana, I met and talked with Akosua Perbi, a Ghanaian historian from the University of Legon. I had read her book *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana* (2004) with great interest. In the book she explores the history of slavery in Ghana and the stigma with which this history is still surrounded in Ghana today.³² Several of her colleagues and students at the university told me that the book was a very brave academic work, since it touched on such a delicate matter, as slavery certainly seemed to be in Ghana. Some mentioned that she could only write this book because of her family’s long and well-respected position within the intellectual elite in Ghana. I had a strong sense that the situation of the frightened woman running out of the Frederiksgave building (discussed in Chapter Four), as well as the lack of a common name for the site, had to do with this delicate matter.

In a Danish-produced movie about the slave trade, another Ghanaian historian explains:

For us [in Ghana], history is not an academic subject; you go to the classroom and study to get an A or B or C or D. It has a value. The value is, enshrined in it you find the philosophy of the people. You don't want to talk about, too much about the defeats, the ugliness. You want to talk about the victories and successes. You want to encourage the generation you are talking to. You want to encourage them to think in a certain way. To say that you see: our ancestors were great people. They were great people. They achieved this [...] so that you too have to continue with their line, so that you too achieve, you continue with this greatness. Also in some places during the slave trade, you find that many people were wrestled from inland [...] so some of those who are descendants, they don't want to talk about it. Those who were taken as slaves, they suffered a lot, and they are still asked, if you spoke to descendants of those who were taken away, they still face discrimination every single day of their life.³³

The Ghanaian historian conveys an understanding of history as containing a perspective – a philosophy of a people – thereby foregrounding the people as writers, in opposition to the idea of letting history speak with a universal voice. Further, history for this Ghanaian historian is continuous, rather than interrupted and divided into periods or 'chapters.' It seems that the line of blood and the family's achievement are decisive for the future life of the family. If your descendants happen to have been enslaved people, it seems that this position somehow continues in the present and could make people suffer from discrimination. For this reason, it might be better if it is ignored rather than talked about. The burden of history, so to speak, is on the descendants of the once enslaved. Conversely, Ghanaian descendants of those who kept slaves, for instance the royal families, are not tainted by the inhumane practice of their forefathers; instead the focus is on their achievements and greatness.

Likewise in the Common Heritage Project, there was an implicit idea that there was a long continuous line for 'us' to engage in. For the Danes, myself included, this was a continuity with 'our' past trading compatriots and skilled builders. Interestingly, it seemed as if both the continuity *and* the distance in time were vital to the very idea of Frederiksgave: the continuity was a precondition

for even engaging in the heritage work – it is after all our shared past – and, as discussed in Chapter Two, the distance in time made it possible to construe the heritage work at Frederiksgave as somehow transcending the past exploitation of enslaved workers and thus as a straightforward matter of informing objectively about a common history. The ‘innocence’ with which the project planners designed the Frederiksgave project – in spite of some Ghanaians’ unease with the issue of slavery – made it possible to highlight without embarrassment the continuity with the former Danish presence on the West African Coast. This was also reflected in present-day expressions such as ‘we had forts...’, ‘we were engaged in the trade with slaves...’ and ‘our shared past...’ and so on, that established a historical continuity, but without necessarily transferring any blame. Instead of linking with consanguineous families, as the historian argued was the case in Ghana, most of the Danes engaging with the site imagined communities in the form of a nation that ‘we’ the Danes could link up with by means of the common heritage site.³⁴ However, this perceived history of the Danish part of the common past as being linked with that of the forefathers, but also far enough away from them so as to not having inherited any guilt because of the use of enslaved workers, seemed not to be paralleled in Ghana. Indeed, slavery was and is still a powerful and delicate subject in Ghana,³⁵ and apparently it continues to run in the veins of the descendants – something that I also became familiar with through my work with family houses in Osu, where the issue of slavery repeatedly became a pregnant one during my conversations with people, particularly when the question of who qualified to inherit part of the house had to be settled.³⁶ I was told both by the two historians, Perbi and Odotei, and also by people living in Accra, that after their liberation slaves had been adopted into families who took care of them over the ensuing years. In present-day Ghana, these relations could, at times, cause trouble and could even bring families to court. Knowledge of the family’s genealogy became, then, a very important instrument in such trials. Given that it was such a delicate matter, it was always highly interesting and potentially fraught to see how the guides at the forts along the coast used and talked about the dungeons where slaves had been kept. The effect was especially powerful when we stood in the dark, humid and only sparsely ventilated rooms, on the uneven cobblestones, bathed in sweat, while a guide told us about

the masses of people who had been crowded into the room in inhuman conditions. It always felt awful to descend into the dark dungeons or walk over the threshold and see around us the rusty bars. Once I experienced an extremely tense moment when one guide at Elmina castle guided our Danish group into one of the dark rooms. Still outside, he suddenly closed the rusty door behind us, locking us up. He did it with a smile, and the tension was only maintained for a few seconds. It was strange because immediately all my associations with the former slaves vanished like dew before the sun, and I was instantly brought to a present where my colleagues from Denmark and I became whiter than white, our racial differences foregrounded. The few moments in the dungeons were a mixture of aversion, repentance – and of course many other feelings. In this instance the guide pointed to the legacy of European involvement in slavery by playfully reversing the roles. But was this a postcolonial moment? Was it a moment of theorising sameness and differences in new ways? Was it an instance of contingent symmetry? Well, not really: rather than creating new differences and sameness, the relations were in some ways merely reversed. The ‘the white people’ were locked into the dungeon by ‘the black people’. From the outset the entities were the same; the only – significant – difference was that the power relations at the beginning of the twenty-first century were momentarily reversed. One could indeed object to such an understanding of the situation, claiming that I overemphasise the dualism. The guide might have done it with any group of both Africans and Europeans; maybe race was not an issue. Perhaps so, but yet I will argue that the forts and the guided tours are amplifiers of differences along racial lines of white oppressors and black victims.³⁷ The Joseph Project, as mentioned above, might even have stressed such differences at the forts along the Ghanaian coast. Other instances, too, pointed to ideas of these apparently long-lived hierarchical relations between black and white people. On one visit to the Cape Coast Castle, some African Americans discreetly refused to follow our group of Danes.³⁸ Our guide later told me that this often happened, and that ‘black Americans’ did not want to visit the dungeons in the company of ‘white people’ – their former tormentors. Edward Bruner, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Katharina Schramm³⁹ have all discussed how the involvement of groups of African Americans in the renovation of one of the forts in Ghana

created discussions about how history should be told at the site. The presence at the forts in Ghana of African Americans, Ghanaians and Europeans indeed indicates that postcolonial settings are much more complicated than the duality between 'black' and 'white' can capture.

The intense experience of the fort dungeons along the coast was apparently also imitated at Frederiksgave. Every now and then, the guides would take visitors up to the small room under the bipartite staircase and present it as a dungeon where slaves were kept. Even one of the drivers for the Frederiksgave project once took a group of Danish archaeologists and me on such a guided tour of Frederiksgave. After asking us to wait outside the first building, where we looked at the display cases with exhibited excavated objects, he gathered our small group and headed directly towards the symmetrical axis where the door under the staircase was placed. He asked us to go inside, and followed, closing the door. Even though we were only six people in the small dark room, we felt packed in like sardines. I could glimpse the white in his eyes as he told us that, 'In here they kept the slaves before they were sent over there – fifty!'. We immediately switched to Danish, and mumbled to each other that this was 'a cock-and-bull story', and that even under inhumane conditions, fifty people could never fit in this small room. From the wall sheets on display and from books we had read about the period and the place, we *knew* that it was a plantation, and that the enslaved workers lived in slave huts further down the road. According to historical sources well-known to us, this place did *not* have dungeons and was *not* part of the transatlantic slave trade as our driver tried, however unsuccessfully, to convey. Implicitly, we activated presumed indisputable historical archives in the room under the stairs to set the story straight. In the moment, the guide could not be seen as a co-producer of our shared past, only as a purveyor of tall tales.

In other words, visiting the room under the stairs with our driver who told us about the transatlantic slave trade did not awaken the fetish, to use the vocabulary of the previous chapter. That is, in the encounter with the driver's story the materiality of the place did not affect us as he might have hoped; the cramped room did not produce magic in the sense he tried to convey. The material did not become effective as a dungeon because we *knew* that another story was the

truth. Using the darkness and small size of the room, the driver attached a false story to the place; it was *facticii*, idolatry. Besides, we could also calculate that our driver's estimate of the number of enslaved people kept in the room pointed to his ignorance of the history of the site. But with this obvious exaggeration and the story of the transatlantic slave trade, perhaps he was also trying to convey something else. Apart from giving us the story that had attracted thousands of foreigners to Ghana over the last three decades, and disassociating the village with plantation slavery, by his clearly exaggerated estimate of the number of people in the room he was perhaps trying to communicate a general story about the inhumane treatment of people. Instead of dismissing his ideas about the room under the stairs, we could have acknowledged it as a shared sense of inhumanity and inequality that we might all have felt when visiting the site, and that we could have agreed to speak about. This moment could have been an opportunity to explore the infra-sameness I talked about before, that is, a useful sameness that allows for differences and that is good enough for a few here-and-nows. The inhumane conditions of the enslaved workers might be an interesting starting point for dialogue, rather than, as we saw it, a conclusion settling what happened at a particular site. This would have been similar to the case discussed earlier, in which agreeing to name Frederiksgave a 'museum' might have been a good starting point for dialogue.

It was different in the dungeons at the 'real' forts and castles. Here we – myself and other Danish visitors – *knew* that these were the real dungeons. Being there and sensing the place created a contact with the past that seemed trustworthy and in accordance with historical knowledge, which was not the case with the room under the stairs at the Frederiksgave site. Many of us had actually read the Danish writer Thorkild Hansen's trilogy about Danish involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and were, through various Danish history books and old diaries, generally well informed and prepared to visit the historical sites; we had a shared knowledge, in the sense of the 'same history' used and assumed by the project planners.

The different experiences in the two kinds of rooms – the dungeons at the forts and the room beneath the stairs at Frederiksgave – say something about the kind of knowledge that was produced at the different sites. Or rather, I would

argue that it tells us that our knowledge was understood as independent of being at the sites; we did not need to be there in order to know what had happened. Being there and listening to cock-and-bull stories with far-fetched estimates did not make us change our minds – it did not produce new knowledge of our common past. Our knowledge was produced elsewhere: in books, archives, universities and museums. Like reading the ruler as an external measure that could provide us with accurate answers, reading and listening to this knowledge made us certain about what had ‘truly’ happened in these places in the past. Being there was mainly just a supplement to our knowledge. Its purpose was to attach sensuous experiences and images to what we already knew. And yet, as we explored in Chapter Three in relation to mimesis, one of the characteristics of a representational form of knowledge is that it makes separations between knowledge and the senses. As the singing roots conveyed to us, such a separation was challenged at the site. Cultural heritage was not something that could be observed from a distance. On the contrary, its effect was produced in encounters made up of people, material, topography, histories and so on, in the joints of the concrete. It requires a kind of orthodoxy to keep up a separation like this, and the divide involuntarily creates friction or awkward moments when encountering the world in the here-and-now. However, beneath the staircase our knowledge was indeed orthodox, in that it did not allow for interpretations that fell outside the settled logic. We *knew* that the Frederiksgave plantation had not been integrated into the transatlantic slave trade, and that the room had not been used for storing slaves. Excepting the clear exaggeration in numbers, we might have believed our driver if we had heard the same story from professionals. But expressed by a layman alone, it was not sufficient to challenge our knowledge. However, we failed to hear what other messages his propositions could have entailed, and thus to engage in a postcolonial moment. Our knowledge was not seen as an outcome but as settled information picked up in books and talks from experts,⁴⁰ only to be illustrated and represented by the actual site of Frederiksgave and the forts.

In order to understand knowledge as the outcome of encounters, rather than pre-given entities, ‘an opening up and loosening’⁴¹ may be necessary at such moments. Contrary to the idea of ‘digging our heels in’ mentioned in

Chapter Two, a postcolonial moment should challenge one's metaphysics, thus enabling 'difference to be collectively enacted'.⁴² At Frederiksgave this would mean exploring what the site *does* as a cultural heritage site, rather than merely judging it in terms of how well it confirms the 'true' story about the plantation. With such a performative understanding, what happens on the guided tours quickly becomes rather ambiguous and not just an illustration of common knowledge, understood as a sharing of the same story.

The experience in the room under the stairs is a case in point whereby ambiguity is explored along lines of *really knowing* what happened, on the one hand, and stories linking to issues such as transatlantic slavery and the inhumane conditions in which enslaved people were kept by 'our forefathers', on the other. But it would be too simple to reduce what happened in the room under the stairs to either a matter of 'really knowing what happened' or to a 'cock-and-bull story'. However, going beyond such an either/or also requires effort. First, our clear dismissal of the driver's story as untrustworthy should cause us to think again – not to accept anything as a valid story but to question our own certainty and thereby our epistemic practices. And second, why should we do this? I suggest that it is nothing less than a matter of imagining futures; in this sense, heritage work can engage times to come as much as pasts. Importantly, possibilities for making different futures are not restricted to former colonised places; they could just as well take place in the former colonising countries.⁴³ For instance, the visit mentioned above to the Frederiksgave site was followed by discussions among our small group of Danes. In these discussions we talked precisely about the inhumane treatment, and felt bad that 'our nation' had been involved in such atrocities as having slaves and participating in the transatlantic slave trade. Even though we did not discuss it with our Ghanaian driver, his story somehow lived on in our discussions. After all, our knowledge of slavery was not necessarily closed down in pre-given entities, even if it had appeared so in the momentary enclosure of the room beneath the staircase. The driver had shaped our ensuing discussions – and implicitly urged us to see the challenge that such heritage can pose as one of engaging with problematic pasts rather than invoking History as grounds for dismissal and/or affirmation. Inhumane conditions seemed to be a good common starting point for engaging with a

postcolonial history that enables new futures, whereas it was more difficult to allow for infra-sameness or the literal differences between ‘fort’ and ‘plantation’. Later on the day of the visit to Frederiksgave, we likened our experience under the stairs to the other ‘cock-and-bull stories’ we had heard during our visits to the forts and castles. The most treasured stories among the Danes often came from guided tours at Prindsensten, which had been a Danish fort used in the transatlantic slave trade. After the Danes sold their possessions to the British, Prindsensten, like many other European forts, was turned into a prison in the twentieth century, due to its solid military construction. A newer British prison had been added to the fort construction, and had been in use until some decades ago. Unfortunately, the city in which the old fort was located had fallen victim to huge sea erosion, and as a result only two bastions, a curtain wall and some rooms built into the thick wall, remained of the Danish fort construction. Even though the coastline had moved closer to the city over the years, and a storm tide had destroyed part of the Danish-built fort, the erosion did not affect the English part of the prison, which had maintained its ground-plan and walls. But the deserted and uninhabited edifice left behind by the Danes and the British had clearly been hit by the ravages of time. Yet it was still possible to walk into the rooms, partly guarded by armoured doors and bars in the window holes.

A guide was employed by the official authority, the Ghana Museum and Monuments Board, to show tourists and school children around ‘the fort’, as it was called in the town. The guide did not tell us about the purpose of the newer English prison extension. Instead, he showed us around the rooms, telling horrible stories about the treatment of slaves. In one of the smaller rooms was a rather big, modern, rusty iron-made weight, of a type I had seen in old storage rooms in Denmark, where they were used to weigh big boxes and bags. Standing in this rather uncomfortable ramshackle and dirty room, the enthusiastic guide pointed to the weight and told us that the slaves were weighed there before being sent abroad. Even though it was clearly from a period after the transatlantic slave trade, many visitors, myself included, did not question the weight at that moment. We were all absorbed in the painful and awful history of the transatlantic slave trade. The fact that we were standing on the West African coast in a former fort made the sensuousness of the place affect us. It was

very different from reading books or listening to professionals in auditoria and offices. Just as the architect had listened to the roots, we listened to the weight as it was invoked by the guides; it seemed to speak to us in a language that we could understand, and silently we stood still and heard about the commoditisation of people in the transatlantic slave trade. On some guided tours, however, some of the more vigilant visitors started to argue with the guides. Every time that happened, the guides slowly resigned.

The guided tour at Prindsensten could be recognised as post-colonialism in Fanon's (2001) understanding, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter; it had a dual structure of white oppressors and black victims (later to be called colonisers versus colonised). Just as when we had been momentarily locked up in the dungeons, the guides at Prindsensten spoke to our 'white' bad conscience regarding greed, commoditisation and inhumane treatment. Built on settled population groups, these moments in the fort most often missed the opportunity to nurture a postcolonial moment as understood by Verran. Both partners ('white' and 'black') seemed to avoid the dialogue.

As at the Frederiksgave site, the cock-and-bull stories at Prindsensten created disconcertment among the Danish visitors I saw there. At times, these well-prepared visitors even expressed disappointment and irritation that the history was so obviously distorted. This was too serious a story to take lightly, being a subject delicate even in Denmark, as many Danes I talked to reasoned. Many noted that in Danish schools we had not learned about the cruel, violent history of the transatlantic slave trade, and a Dane explained to me that it was because 'it did not fit with our Danish self-understanding of being a small, innocent and humane country'. So accuracy, details and expertise were treasured virtues among the well-prepared Danish visitors, as well as for the heritage workers. Visiting the various forts and castles, they tried to answer the question: what had actually happened here? Various ways of reaching the point of origin to go back to what Frederiksgave and other forts were *really* like were persistently explored among visitors and heritage workers. At Frederiksgave, having posters saying one thing but guides saying another challenged these virtues and unsettled the common knowledge that the Frederiksgave site was supposed to affirm and exemplify. Knowledge, it seemed, was often produced somewhere

other than at the sites; yet my point is that generating new understandings *was* a potential when encountering the site, even if these were seen at first glance as mere supplements to our knowledge, as stated above. Again, however, it would be too simple to reduce any potential postcolonial moments to the situation in the room at the fort. True to their own ideas, postcolonial moments could, obviously, be nurtured in situations that went beyond dialogues between ‘black’ and ‘white’. At times, discussions would arise among the Danes on the three hour-long car ride back to Accra from Prindsensten. At such moments, the atrocities of the past were discussed, and the fact that both Danes and the people from the coast at that time had been heavily involved in the inhumane trade was debated. The role of the African Americans who had painted graffiti in the dilapidated building was likewise discussed. Like the rusty weight, the stories that the guides communicated about the former Danes as greedy, lecherous people could sometimes collapse the time between then and now, and make the past stretch into the present. All these discussions had the potential to give rise to new understandings of the slave trade and of ‘our forefathers’, ourselves and the role of local people in the slave trade. Engaging in discussion, we raised questions of present-day poverty in Africa as opposed to our wealth and opportunities. We discussed colonialism, mercantilism, European hypocrisy and African culture and tradition and often we did not reach a conclusion; but the point is that the sites had provoked discussion – the sites had caused differences and sameness to be opened anew, discussed and settled in new momentary entities and ‘truths’.

I had the chance to stay for a while in the town where the fort of Prindsensten was located. Interestingly, the same issues were debated among the people of the town in long and vibrant discussions every afternoon in front of the fort, as mentioned in Chapter Four. Here, as well, we nurtured postcolonial moments, shared perspectives, discussed disagreements and had our opinions and vocabulary changed every now and then. During my stay in the town, I followed the guided tours and became friends with the guides. While talking about the tours, they told me many details about the fort that they had either read or heard from earlier visitors. They also had a few books that visitors had donated to the place. So when I asked why they told stories about slavery in the English prison they gave a little smile and answered that that was what most visitors wanted

to hear – especially the African American visitors. They did not come to the fort to hear about an old colonial prison for Ghanaian criminals, they came to see dungeons and hear about ‘the mistreatment of slaves by the whites’, one of the guides explained to me.⁴⁴ With such an argument, the guides indirectly told me that knowledge was an outcome of encounters. The various types of knowledge produced in the here-and-now were important to make the heritage work. However, their ideas of what visitors might want to hear often seemed pre-given, and turned the encounters into pre-structured meetings of ‘black’ and ‘white’ in which dialogue was avoided and a specific history guarded, as was the case with the weight. Sometimes the knowledge produced worked, and at other times it did not; it seemed that cultural heritage was made up of different knowledges, revealing it to be made up of complex materialisations of value.

MARGINAL GAINS AND VALUE REVISITED

During my fieldwork, I often heard the former European places along the Ghanaian coast talked of as ‘tourist attractions’. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Ghanaian coordinator had been in close contact with the Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations when planning the Frederiksgave project. I therefore thought that I might gain interesting insights from talking to someone from the Ministry in Accra who had been involved. One morning, I dressed in my white shirt and long trousers and succeeded in reaching the Ministry without getting too dusty and dishevelled. With the help of some friendly civil servants, I was taken to a senior official’s door. I knocked on the door, opened it and behind a huge desk covered with papers and a computer sat a sizeable, smiling man who immediately invited me in. The obligatory radio standing on the table was, like the air-conditioning, turned on. Another man, presumably an employee, was sitting idly in one of the stuffed chairs placed along two of the walls. I presented myself and he agreed to talk, saying that he had half an hour. The dialogue went very well; we laughed at the awkwardness that we produced, and he seemed to like my curiosity and direct, insistent questions. With his permission I turned on my recorder. First we talked about the different European initiatives in Ghana, and he explained:

Senior official: 'As part of our plans to improve our tourist attraction, the Minister was of the opinion that we should look at all the historical things that we have in common with the European countries and I said, and I came to an understanding, because I saw how important these things are to the [European] countries, and the people from those countries, because, the people from Germany come around and they go all the way to Prindsenstown, to look at that old castle, they go there because of a common link, that that is what shows them, that their country was once one of the important countries in the west... in Ghana, or in the Gold Coast. The Dutch have been very very positive in this area, Elmina, they have taken the trouble to develop Elmina, I mean they give loans, they give grants, they give donations, for anything that goes to improve Elmina, because Elmina is one of the eh, the Dutch strong point in, when they came, in fact, last year, they invited us to Amsterdam and we went to the archives, and I was surprised, to see how they value Elmina castle, we saw the models, everything, you know, it is part of their heritage, their historical this thing, and I didn't know it was that important.

Nathalia: No, and why do you think it is so important for them?

Senior official: [Laughing] for them, I mean it shows that at a certain point in time, they were captured as one of the top powers in the world, they were then leading international trading, you know, having colonies and all those things, so historically it makes them look very powerful, are you with me?

Nathalia: Yeah, yeah, I understand

Senior official: Because, when they talk about colonial powers, they also can, because they have some places in Africa, where they were trading, and doing all sorts of things, so it is very important to them.

Nathalia: So you think it is important for them, because it reminds them of when they were big?

Senior official: Yes! It is very important!

For the senior official, it seemed obvious that colonialism and foreign politics were vital parts of the small European nations' sudden interest in the past. This

was clearly an understanding that collided with the intentions of the initiatives in the hot colonies as communicated by the two coordinators quoted in the introduction to Chapter Two. When I asked about the Frederiksgave Project, the senior official explained:

Senior official: '[...] And the Danish connection, as I said, the Minister was interested when the, this eh Sesemi restoration thing started, because he thought if we develop it properly we can even have a lot of eh, people coming from Denmark, those places, just to see what they have done, that would be good for us because we want to increase our attractions, they have Christiansborg castle, they have things in the country that show that the Danes were here, we have names 'Isert' [a German doctor sent out to the Danish trading stations by the end of the eighteenth century] eh those, we have certain names that are pure direct eh, you know, so there are some, what we call 'the shared heritage', which we should exploit for as long as it can get our tourist product to become more attractive to more people. That it is not only the British that we dealt with, that we dealt with the Dutch, with the Danes, the so and so, we should, for a good marketing strategy we should be able to exploit these things, so the thing that has been done at Sesemi, if we handle it well, I believe people from Denmark, when they come to west Africa, they will definitely want to pass by and see what is there, naturally. For us that would be achieving the objective that we have set ourselves. So he [the Minister] was very interested when he got to know, and we went there, right from the beginning, I thought it was [he laughs again], some very wild idea, [noise] I saw it happen [laughter] you know, bringing the things and building the whole thing again, but I now see that it can be done

Nathalia: But you thought it was a strange project in the beginning?

Senior official: Yeah

Nathalia: Yes, but why?

Senior official: Why [laughter] at this time [laughter] we do, people want to come re... re... you know, I thought it was a bit, a bit eh, remote, [laughter] that eh, so

Nathalia: A bit remote the place or just to do this thing?

Senior official: To do the thing [...] but now I know that if there is anything in the historical this thing, you can develop it and create a product out of it, purely for tourism.

Nathalia: Why do you think that the Danes were interested in doing such a 'remote' thing, why do you think they did it?

Senior official: [Laughter] I think [laughter] they also want to think of their past [loud laughter]

Nathalia: When we were big?

Senior official: Yeah, why not, why not [loud laughter]'

Indeed, our meeting produced lots of laughter. I would argue that it was nurtured by the awkwardness resulting from the different ways of valuing the past that became so apparent during our talk. As a European, I might be valuing these sites intensely for their history. For the senior official, over the years European historical traces came to be seen as products, 'purely for tourism' – even remote projects such as Frederiksgave could be turned into products attracting tourists. In the previous chapter, the history of the fetish pointed to 'the mystery of value.' My point here is that this mystery is repeated centuries later in the dialogue with the senior official at the Ministry. Possibly, in his eyes, the ruin at Frederiksgave could have been termed 'trinkets and trifles' as the European traders termed goods centuries ago. The Minister, however, had already understood the Europeans' desire for and interest in their former presence on the Ghanaian coast, and actually encouraged his staff to look for 'all things' marked by the Europeans. I would suggest that the laughter in the senior official's office resonates with the joking about the Danish architect's enthusiasm and meticulous interest in old lime, clay and stones, expressed by the man in Keta (see Chapter Four). And it also resonates with the Chief of the village's exclamation that the reconstruction project was a miracle, also discussed in Chapter Four. Even 'trinkets and trifles' can be turned into a miracle or developed into a product, 'purely for tourism', as the senior official had witnessed in the case of the remote project to revitalise a ruin in Sesemi.

What is evident in these encounters in Ghana is that value is indeed relative and emergent in actual encounters between things and institutions, rather than an inherent quality. This is similar to the experience gained in the early encounters between Europeans and people living on the West African coast centuries ago. But as Berry notes ‘[c]onsensus on price does not require consensus on what is being exchanged.’⁴⁵ In other words, different ways of valuing objects need not be a problem in a trading situation.

With the arrival of the Protestant Dutch merchants on the coast, new ideas of objects arose, as described in the previous chapter. All objects could potentially be turned into commodities that could be exchanged. In this way the Dutch, and with them most northern European countries, deflated ideas about the mystery of value. Any notion of spirituality as adding mystery to the material world was exhausted, and objects were turned into potential commodities – as Pietz argues, the objects’ reality was seen to be proved by ‘their silent “translatability” across alien cultures.’⁴⁶ If material objects were given other meanings and values, then this was understood as a given culture’s credulity and lack of reason.⁴⁷ Any other ideas about material objects that went beyond such silent translatability were thought of as being against ‘natural reason and rational market activity’.⁴⁸ The mystery of value was replaced with arrogance; lack of reason was the only explanation for the unpredictability of value they experienced. Even though this was the beginning of mercantilism and its national protection policies, trade was paradoxically seen as universal, rational, neutral and free; the things exchanged amounted to the same. Centuries later, the businessman and billionaire Bill Gates expressed a similar vision in his aspirations to a ‘friction-free capitalism’⁴⁹ – a market with no friction in exchange. This frictionless and universal understanding of value (goods and transactions) is challenged by Jane Guyer in her book *Marginal Gains* (2004). Guyer notes that equivalence has been fundamental to the theory of exchange, but she then remarks that ethnography on African monetary exchange ‘shows evidence of asymmetry of value, as a permanent and culturally marked feature.’⁵⁰ Instead of arising out of and maintaining equilibrium, Guyer argues that value arises out of disjuncture. In order to understand this, one needs to pay attention to the separation between soft and hard currency. Guyer explains

how the latter characterises Western money and its tight and ‘hard’ relations to institutions and laws.⁵¹ Hard currencies are infinitely convertible, and are financially monitored every day. Soft currencies, however, which she argues are characteristic of the Nigerian economy, are not infinitely convertible but restricted to allocated amounts. The Nigerian economy is mainly based on monetisation, with no credit cards, no checks and no automated accounts. At least 60% of the currency issued in Nigeria ‘never goes back through the banking system again’.⁵² As a result of the West’s different currencies, institutions and formal regulations are key instruments in disciplining people’s market experiences, whereas in Nigeria market experiences are disciplined through popular conventions.⁵³

In a special edition of *African Studies Review*, several scholars who have worked in Africa were invited to comment on Guyer’s book *Marginal Gains*. Geschiere, Goheen and Piot follow the thread of the different currencies and write that in economies with ‘soft money’ people learn to constantly switch between standards. This instability, they argue, inspired by Guyer, is not a sign of weakness in the economies but rather shows ‘their ability to bridge enduring disjunctures that allows actors to realise the ‘marginal gains’ that are crucial to these economies’.⁵⁴ Disjunctures are key to understanding processes of valuation and of gains in such systems – as Barber summarises in her comment in the same edition:

difference and disjuncture, the proliferation of scales of value and methods of reckoning, are not a mere by-product of tribal compartmentalization [...]. Rather, they are something that African merchants deliberately fostered and maintained, because it is in crossing the thresholds between discontinuous scales, and in manipulating alternative, multiple modes of evaluation, that gain lies. This view puts performance center stage.⁵⁵

Disjunctures are to be cultivated rather than erased; it is precisely the lability which is vital in the constitution of value in African economies.⁵⁶ This lability is developed rather than seen as an expression of limited and powerless institutions. As Verran puts it, ‘What is instituted is an openness that ensures ongoing

possibilities for contingency and multiplicity, rather than working toward single, closed standards and norms'.⁵⁷ This insight might be very important for understanding more about the values of the Frederiksgave project. As we have heard, the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB) played a very unobtrusive role in the reconstruction of the Common Heritage Site. The board members did not have any objections to the way the buildings were reconstructed, and neither did they play an active role in setting up the exhibition. Even though central to the project, the Ghanaian coordinator and archaeologist had only a few comments on the exhibition, and he seemed either forbearing or indifferent towards the stories circulating at the site, shrugging his shoulders when I asked him about the incommensurable histories told. The educational programmes for local guides that were to ensure the transmission of the story developed by the experts were, as we have heard, continually neglected. Of course, the reasons for this difference may be manifold, but instead of understanding it as merely a matter of weak institutions, lack of political will, or neglect or fear of awakening a precarious history, we might also see it as part of an effort not to settle history into one storyline. In other words, to leave room for marginal gains. What looked like passivity to the people from the Danish National Museum were perhaps ambitious ways of cultivating the lability necessary in order to secure gains – a lability which, from the Danes' point of view, had to be eradicated like false idols. The Ghanaian institutions involved in the project might, in fact, play their most important role in securing this openness instead of policing the borders and insisting on hard currency. Therefore, rather than sanctioning the way in which the heritage should be reconstructed, as was the case in the other hot colony of Trankebar in India – where the museum waited several years for approval and a contract from the Indian bureaucracy – in Ghana the ideas from the National Museum were met with positive and rather frictionless statements. The gains for the Ghanaian partners, then, are not achieved through a capacity building that installs sameness and equivalence as a kind of hard, translatable currency. The soft currency of common heritage is more than a side-effect – indeed, the very notion of currencies can be foregrounded as the shared locus of encounter between the different valuations that make up the Frederiksgave site.

A POSTCOLONIAL MOMENT IN HERITAGE WORK

Postcolonial moments are, as we have seen, characterised by containing possibilities of telling differences and sameness in new ways, and of allowing symmetry to be a contingent quality emerging in encounters across divides. Such moments stress that things and their value are not given as such, but appear in so far as we make and shape them; this does not assume the *a priori* existence of entities such as coloniser/colonised as the given starting point. In her book *Science and an African Logic*, Verran argues:

Postcolonialism here is not a break with colonialism, not a revolution, a history begun when a particular ‘us’ who are not ‘them,’ suddenly coalesces as opposition of colonizer. [...] In this narrative frame [the book], colonialism is remade in postcolonial enacting. Postcolonialism is the ambiguous struggling through and with colonial pasts in making different futures.⁵⁸

By struggling through this, I have explored how differences and sameness worked in the Frederiksgave project, and exploded ideas of translatability, valuation and reversal of established hierarchies. My point has been to argue that heritage work might operate productively with the co-presence of multiple currencies, including soft ones. In light of this, the Common Heritage Site, I would argue, cannot be self-identical or given a universal value as a natural culmination of history. As Verran has it, ‘Learning to “do” the other’s figures is, among other things, good fun.’⁵⁹ For all the laughter ringing in this chapter, though, the very serious point of exploring these encounters via postcolonial moments is to show new and other ways to make the world around us, including past events.

PARTIAL HISTORIES AND COMMON KNOWLEDGE

To conclude this book, let me briefly outline the ground covered so far. In order to qualify the Common Heritage Project, I have engaged the Frederiksgave project through four interrelated analytical takes that show how common heritage was *shared*, *altered*, *valued* and *generated*. The idea was to explore heritage work

on firm and intensely specific ethnographic ground – ‘sweating the detail’,⁶⁰ as Handler and Gable put it, in and through which I show Frederiksgave emerging in particular shapes, dependent on the perspective through which it is seen. Consequently, I have not ‘applied’ four different theories on heritage, but have made use of ethnography to let the Frederiksgave Common Heritage Project come to life in different ways and interrelate in the pages of this book. A project on collaborative cultural heritage allows for just such experimentation. This is my attempt at developing an anthropology of common ground as a particular kind of postcolonial scholarship. My point here is to suggest that careful attention to details and ‘small stories’ can provide us with an interesting insight into a vital nerve in the production of both common heritage and ethnographic analysis. Exactly because they are figures that are so meticulously nurtured, details have a strong analytical potential, being well described and thereby explicitly entailing many relations about what they are not. Throughout the book, I have thus relentlessly treated details and small stories as my field site for common heritage. What we see through these is all the common heritage that there can be.

The frictional events, so abundant during fieldwork and appearing in statements, gestures, laughs, disagreements, letters, and other ‘details’, showed that entities, common heritage included, are produced as figures in relation to other figures and, in this light, the whole book is a study of how subjects and objects emerge awkwardly on common ground. This is the overall anthropological point: that the discipline holds the potential to engage in collective processes of world-making. As we have seen, persons, nations, topography, buildings, histories, to mention but a few of the figures we have met, are thus produced in the ongoing work taking place in the field, as well as on these pages. Generating heritage, then, is not restricted to the work undertaken at the Frederiksgave site, but has equally been my ambition in this text. This is consistent with my anthropological goal of providing a generative analysis, one that adds and composes, rather than subtracts and deconstructs.⁶¹ In the same vein, critique – or maybe even better, *generative* critique – must be understood as field-based suggestions and alternative qualifications of the concerns involved in creating a common ground across differences.

My project shows us nothing but partial histories and a potential for generating common knowledge. While partiality might at first glance appear as impeding commonness, my point is exactly the opposite, namely that generating common knowledge can only begin with partial histories, abandoning any claim to universality that leaves room for only one version. Commonness, in my view, simply implies more than one – but less than many.⁶² It demands an engagement in encounters where the outcome is not given in advance, and new figures can emerge. By generating common heritage projects, we are provided with a unique potential to allow for a sameness that does not preclude differences, and are thus enabled to make the most of partiality in knowledge production. Heritage projects have the privilege of engaging with such differences and sameness in active and playful ways, by sometimes leaving topics unsettled and making a virtue of indeterminacy. Any aspiration to understand common heritage as a universal given to be protected and safeguarded for all time may put obstacles in its own path, and leave great potential undeveloped. Part of the magic of heritage, I propose, rests precisely on the sensuousness that explodes the very notion of universality. I like to think of this as posing the question of what heritage might *also* be?

To allow for and nurture engagement with the unpredictability that inevitably pops up in heritage work, and to be aware of its inherent partiality, is to commonly cultivate a postcolonial moment and an analytical humility. This, in my view, is the least we can do.

