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The Wound and the Voice: Verbal Articulations of Enslavement among the Bulsa and Kasena of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on theories of trauma as a basis for critical reflection on how songs among the Bulsa and Kasena of northern Ghana can enhance our collective understanding of the slave experience within Africa and specifically Ghana. Although literature on memories of slavery within the African collective imagination is rich and varied, these studies have often been silent on how those who lost kith and kin during slave raids within Africa, where the bulk of slaves were mostly captured, have often tried to cope, represent and reconstruct the memories of their traumatic past. Drawing on fieldwork through recording of traditional performances and songs from these cultural areas, the paper emphasises the significance of understanding the historical, cultural and literary contexts that continue to influence and shape the production and performance of these songs even in contemporary times. The paper has implications not only for those seeking an understanding of how slavery has shaped African societies but also how local communities continue to endure its legacies.

Keywords: *Bulsa, enslavement, Kasena, memories, songs, trauma.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The trauma associated with the Middle Passage and the African American plantation slavery experience is axiomatic. Indeed, through autobiographical writings by ex-enslaved Africans who ended up in the Americas, we have come to understand how American plantation slavery was traumatic (the narratives of Frederick Douglass and Olaudah Equiano are examples). We know, for example, of how the slave was considered "nataly dead and a social non-person" and his humanity denied (See Patterson 1982). The literature is also replete with evidence of how the very essence of *personhood* was threatened through the oppressive nature of American plantation slavery (see Douglass 1845, reprinted 2010; Blassingame 1979; Patterson 1982; Smallwood 2007). What the literature has often been silent on, however, is how those who lost kith and kin during slave raids within the interior of Africa, where the bulk of slaves were captured, have often tried to cope, represent and reconstruct the memories of their traumatic past, which is why attention to the songs of the Bulsa and Kasena of northern Ghana is important especially in how these ethnic groups themselves conceptualise and represent their own sense of trauma.

Although the exact period these songs found their way into the song repertoire of these communities remain uncertain, what remains certain is the fact that these songs have been imaginatively composed to reflect a real cultural and historical experience. In the last decade, my major research has focused primarily on documenting memories of the slave experience in northern Ghana as reflected in their oral traditions and folklore. The primary research methodology I have adopted is the ethnographic fieldwork approach in view of which I have had to interact with clan elders, chiefs, and ordinary men and women as individuals and in groups. I have also recorded songs and traditional performances. This kind of oral data I have dealt with is largely concerned with people describing situations and events their ancestors have experienced, which have become part of the collective memory of the group and which is passed on from one generation to another. Although oral tradition has limitations in terms of how it deals with what is passed on from generation to generation, especially since the amount of data is usually circumscribed (Klein 1989), oral tradition still provides some useful leads into communal memories of the past. The songs I discuss in this paper were collected in and around the Bulsa and Kasena cultural areas. They were transcribed and translated into English as texts with the help of translation experts who are native speakers of the languages under discussion and who are also familiar with the cultural and historical contexts of the study. Although some cultural-specific meanings usually get lost when texts are translated, careful attempts have been made to stay close to the original text as much as possible.

This paper is conceptualised as an intersection between African cultural, historical and literary studies and draws on theories of trauma as a basis for critical reflection on how songs and the oral tradition among these groups can enrich our understanding of the slave experience within Africa and specifically Ghana. The aim of the paper is not to attempt another interpretation of the history of the slave trade in Ghana, but to use these songs as a prism with which to refract and to help us reflect on how slave raiding and the threats of enslavement have come to constitute a living wound among these ethnic groups. The paper is, thus, a departure from the conventional approach of historical analysis and rather focuses on song texts as a basis of critical reflection on how slave raiding threatened to undermine the very ontological basis of a people's society.

The destruction brought about by slave raiding and the slave trade was unprecedented and its consequences, particularly on African people, have been devastating (Diouf 2003: xv). The social, cultural, and economic impact of the slave trade has, thus, been the subject of much scholarly reflection across time and space. Indeed, through varied means of representations, we know in part, numbers of slaves carried across the Atlantic although figures given by scholars of the slave trade have often been inconclusive and have over centuries generated a great deal of controversy.[1] There is also evidence in the literature to suggest that

[1] For the numbers debate, see Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: Wisconsin Press, 1969); David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.* (London: Yale University Press, 2010).

within Africa, slaving empires profited from the selling and buying of human beings in an enterprise that lasted several centuries (See for example Rodney 1972; Manning 1990; Lovejoy 2000; Austin 2005).

There seems to be a consensus among scholars of the slave trade that the majority of slaves who transited through the various castles dotted across the coast into ships across the Middle Passage came from the interior; yet, the experiences of these groups who were often abducted are either often forgotten, dismissed, or sometimes ignored. It is this apparent methodological and conceptual limitation that this paper seeks to address by using the songs of these ethnic groups as a pointer to how a people conceptualise the trauma of capture and enslavement and continue to endure its legacies. Indeed, some attempts have been made by scholars to document memories of the slave trade within some communities in Ghana (See Holsey 2008; Greene 2011; Bailey 2005; Saboro 2013, 2016). The major limitation, however, of some of these studies is their focus on the coastal areas with sometimes marginal reference to northern Ghana and their inability to capture the trauma inherent in the experiences of the people whose history they have sought to reconstruct. These studies also often fail to account for how descendants of the enslaved from these northern communities are confronted daily with the stigma of an enslaved culture and how they are making sense of these painful and traumatic memories of the past; which is why attention to the Bulsa and Kasena is important.

The Bulsa and Kasena are relatively small ethnic minority groups found in the Upper East of Ghana and live near Burkina Faso (See map in Fig.1 below). They are predominantly agrarian cultures and rely on subsistence farming with a few undertaking hunting as leisure activities. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, these cultures became victims of systematic slave raids by Zabarima and Asante slave raiders. Their oral traditions and songs often mention slave raiders such as Babatu, Gazare, Samori and Bagao sometimes collectively as the Zabarima slave raiders (See Der 1998; Opoku-Agyemang 2007; Saboro 2013, 2016). Although Samori is believed to have undertaken little or no slave raiding activity within these areas and Bagao is also relatively unknown, the activities of these slave raiders still resonate within the oral traditions of the people. During fieldwork among these ethnic groups, informants often recounted how the slave raiders mentioned above often terrorised communities and captured their most productive men and women and sold them into slavery. One of my informants, for instance, recounted during one of my interviews as follows: "There are a lot of things we remember. One event we cannot forget in our history is the gwala (slave raider) who came into our land and raided the land".

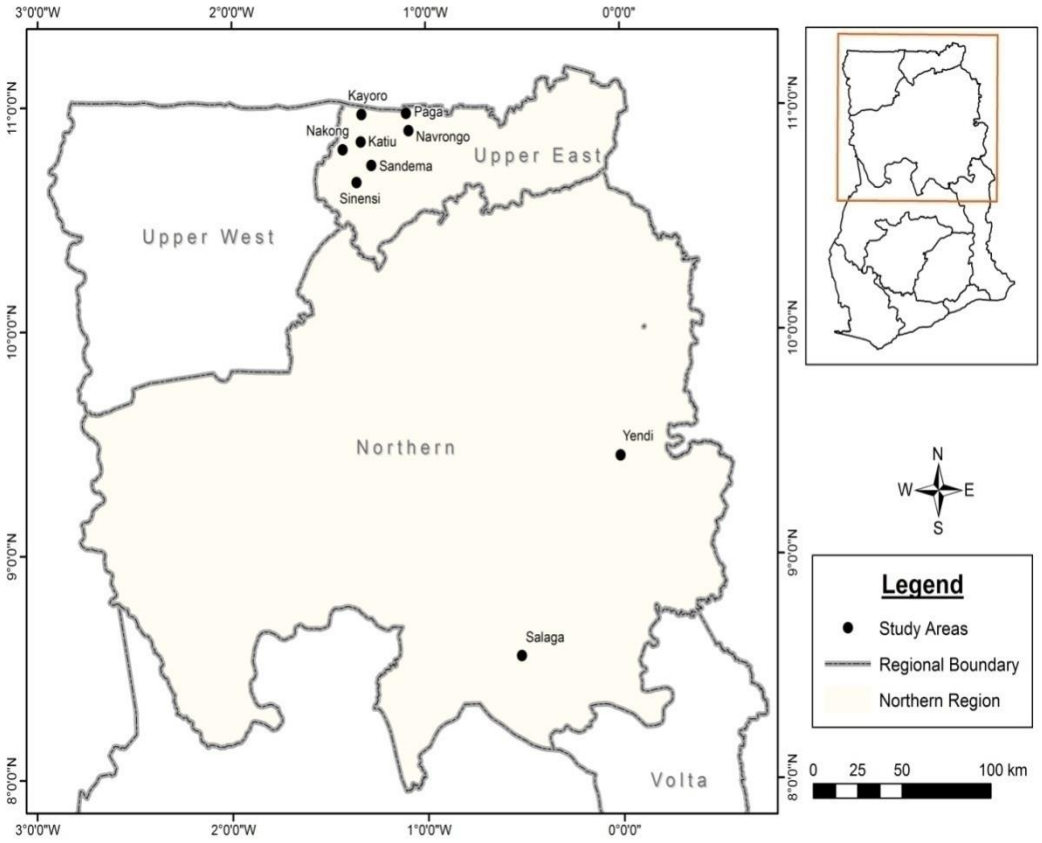

Figure 1. *Map showing the study areas.* Source: Cartographic Unit, University of Cape Coast.

These cultures also have songs in which they lament the devastating consequences of slave raiding and also have songs that celebrate the overthrow of the slave raiding hegemony (See Saboro 2013, 2016, 2017). These songs as I intend to show, are a testament not only to the perpetuation of significant elements of the world view of traumatised cultures, but also, they serve as a basis for the continuation of a strong sense of community. In fact, these songs present these communities with a potential outlet for their individual and communal feelings about traumatic events of the past.

Figure 2. *A photo showing a traditional northern compound*. Photo: Author.

Music making and the song tradition is an important part of a people's cultural expression. The African American experience for example, provides a basis upon which we have come to appreciate the centrality of songs within the social and cultural ethos of the slave on the American plantations. For example, Genovese (1976), Blassingame (1979) and Levine (2007) have provided insights into the independent culture that developed among the enslaved and how slave songs often contained metaphors predicated on human suffering and survival. These slave songs, these scholars have pointed out, were sorrow songs and inherent in them were the sense of trauma, pain and anguish. Indeed, although recent studies on trauma have become increasingly varied and abundant, with emphasis on individual lives, trauma and representations of history and collective memory, there is little on how trauma as a theory has been used to interrogate song texts relative to an indigenous African culture regarding enslavement.

2. A Reflection on Theory

The Greek word, from which *trauma* is derived, connotes a physical injury inflicted on a body. In the medical and psychiatric literature, the term has come to be associated with a wound not only on the body, but also on the mind. Marder (2006:1) has pointed out that, "Although the precise definition of the modern concept of trauma varies according to context and discipline, there is a general consensus of opinion that if trauma is a wound, [then], it is a very peculiar wound"

(See Caruth 1995; Krystal 1995; Erikson 1995). Marder argues further that, "there is no specific set of physical manifestations identifying trauma, and it is almost invariably produces repeated, uncontrollable, and incalculable effects that endure long after its ostensible "precipitating cause".

The relationship between slavery and cultural trauma has also received some level of attention from scholars of varied disciplinary orientations. Of particular significance is the collaborative work by Alexander et al. (2004), who have developed a theoretical model of 'cultural trauma' in which they provide significant insights into our understanding of how social groups remember the past and interact using varied means of representation.

Reflecting on the centrality of trauma and its relationship to an injury, sociologist Erikson (1995:184) has for example suggested that "the term refers not to the injury inflicted but to the *blow* that inflicted it, not to the state of mind that ensues but to the *event* that provoked it". According to Erikson (1995), trauma is both a blow and an event. Within the context of this discussion, trauma relates to how the tissues and central communality of the communities under review have been damaged by slave raiding and enslavement in much the same way as the tissues of the body and mind can be damaged by an accident. The slave raiding experience in these cultures can be considered a wound in many respects. It was physical, emotional and psychological. This wound, as the songs I consider here suggest, has affected the central communality and collective psyche of these communities in very profound ways. Some of the songs allude to the fact that these people were always "running and running a lot".

Writing within the context of the Buffalo Creek community, Erikson (1995: 188) further reminds us that, "the *community* offers a cushion for pain, ... a context for social intimacy, serves as a repository for binding traditions so when this same *community* is profoundly affected, one can speak of a damaged social organism in almost the same way one would speak of a damaged body". The songs are a medium through which the wound of the traumatic experiences of enslavement can be released because implicit in the act of minimising pain is the process of verbalising it (See Scarry 1985; Morris 1991).

3. VOICES RELEASED THROUGH THE WOUND

Caruth (1995), has drawn our attention to the fact that, it is not just the nature of the wound or trauma within the collectivity that is of concern, but of importance also is "the moving sorrowful voice that cries out": that is, the voice released through the wound". According to Caruth (1995:4), trauma transcends the pathology and so it is not simply a matter of a wounded psyche; "it is the story of a wound that cries out, (that addresses us) in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available". The truth, Caruth has asserted, "in its delayed appearance and its belated address cannot be linked only to what is

known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (Caruth 1995: 4).

The attempt to express what still remains unknown makes this paper all the more relevant as it engages, particularly, with the terror and trauma the slave trade inflicted on the two communities under study by examining the unique cultural and literary forms of representation and remembrance of enslavement within these two communities in Northern Ghana. Thus, the paper examines ways in which songs speak about and speak through the profound story of traumatic experience and engages with the complex ways in which certain subtle nuances of the traumatic story of enslavement are remembered, metaphorised and represented within these cultures.

This article pays attention to the wound of enslavement as it applies to the collectivity, with a prime focus on the ways in which the songs reveal a culture traumatised because of enslavement. To describe a people as traumatised, as Erickson (1995: 186) has pointed out, "they have withdrawn into a kind of protective envelope, a place of mute, aching loneliness, in which the traumatic experience can be treated as a solitary burden that needs to be expunged by acts of denial and resistance". Although the songs suggest these cultures to have been traumatised through their experience of enslavement, they have chosen rather not to "withdraw into a kind of protective envelope and remain mute," but to cry out through the wound

4. The Songs and Performance Context

These songs under discussion have been imaginatively composed and are driven by a real cultural and historical experience. In order for us to appreciate these songs as an aesthetic creation with a culturally specific shape within these communities relative to their experiences of enslavement, it is significant to reflect on who sings these songs and on what occasions they are sung, to whom the songs and performances are directed, and whether or not these songs can be found within the public domain.

The songs on the slave raiding experience are not found within the public domain because they are considered sacred and evoke very sad memories (See Saboro 2013). However, they are sometimes performed during the funeral of an elderly statesman during which time the people remind themselves of the communal ideals and values of self-sacrifice and the will to survive even in the face of adversity and tragedy. According to informants, some of these songs are performed during funerals because of the cultures association of enslavement with death. But more importantly, these songs are also re-enacted annually during their Fiok and Fao festivals. Although the Fiok by the Bulsa and Fao by the Kasena are annual agricultural and thanksgiving festivals, they have also become occasions when the people relive and remember their collective experience of enslavement and how they responded to attacks by slave-raiders. During such occasions,

singing groups from around various Bulsa and Kasena communities come together to sing songs that remind them of their collective victory against slave raiders (See Saboro 2013, 2014).

5. Representing the Trauma of Captivity and Enslavement

Although historians and scholars of the slave trade have provided some useful leads into slave raiding and how this constituted a major means of enslavement within Africa, a close reading of these song texts under discussion also provide some significant insights into how these indigenous cultures often remember and articulate the enslavement of their ancestors. A central animating metaphor in these songs is raiding and captivity as terror and predation. Significant variants carried in the songs are largely centred on images of the slave raider as predator and communities as prey.

In recounting community memories of slave raids within the Kasena cultural area, one of my informants, during an interview reminded me that, within the slave raiding context within Kasena collective imagination, "when a slave raider usually succeeded in capturing a whole household, [they usually say that] 'your household has been eaten up' (Interview with Puadura 2012). In other words, the whole of your household has been completely annihilated. Local communities therefore often see this "eating up" of households mostly as an act of terror. One informant Raymond Ali Achengba for example, was emphatic that "the slave raider brought about destruction within our communities" (Interview with Achengba 2017).

This sense and images of predation, terror and communal destruction is aptly expressed in the Buli song, "The slave raider has come to attack me". The women of Bulsa usually sing this song as a dirge. The tone and mood of the song are solemn and the facial expression of the cantor and performance situation depicts the ambience of a funeral. The association of some of these songs to the funeral situation is significant because as some of my informants noted, the slave raiding experience was akin to death both physically and metaphorically. In the performance of the song, the cantor usually repeats "The slave raider has come to attack me" twice or more, usually for the purposes of emphasis. The song presents raiding and the constant threats of enslavement as akin to preying on communities through force and violence. The element of predation, terror and aggression as a means of enslavement is expressed in the song through the word "attack". The song says:

Kanbongka le jam nak mu la
Kanbongka le jam nak mu la
M ŋman ka zaana jigi, ka nak
Mu te mae chali ate baa la mu
Mi poom man ka zaana jigiya

The slave raider has come to attack me
The slave raider has come to attack me
And I have no place to stay
He attacked me and I am running
And people are laughing at me
I do not have a place to stay any longer

Significant elements of predation reflected in the song are "catching" and "attacking", which are defining characteristics of the slave raider. The word "attack" as used in the song is made even more forceful here because of its associated images of pillage, pillaging and plundering, which were major characteristics of slave raiding (See Saboro 2013, 2014). Pillaging and plundering as part of the *modus operandi* of slave raiders, according to informants, often resulted in the destruction of property, livestock and food, thereby threatening the very livelihood and survival of these people, and leaving them vulnerable. And as my informant Achengba reminded me during an interview, "people's cattle were carried away and poverty has remained with us till today" (Interview with Achengba 2017).

Predation through violence, as expressed in the song, interfered with communal cohesion and collective sense of identity given that group cohesion and collective identity formation are impossible when people are always under attack, as was the case with the raiding and invasion. The net effect of these attacks as the song suggests is that people were always on the run, a theme the song clearly articulates. The line in the song, "he attacked me and I am running" (line 4) is informative. Its tone is that of desperation and anguish. These "attacks" produced cultures that were always "running" away from something rather than towards something. The lack of a sense of direction and destination is a traumatic experience and does not suggest a condition that was benign and less cruel.

Although "individual memory is always conceived in relation to a group and individual identity is said to be negotiated within a collectively shared past" (Alexander et al. 2004: 65), we sometimes see individuals articulating intimate personal experiences in these songs. These individual collective memories therefore provide "a cognitive map within which people orient their present behaviour in relation to the larger experiences of the collectivity" (Alexander et al. 2004: 65). Through the recurrence of the lexical items, "he has come to attack me", "I have no place to stay", I am running, and "people are laughing at me", we see "a lone voice" articulating the traumatic experience of enslavement using the personal pronouns, "I", "I am" and "Me". This reinforces the individual's sense of alienation and personal disorientation. The individual becomes "depersonalised" and "dis-socialised" because of attacks by the slave raider. The individual who is the subject of attack ceases to belong and finds no place within the collectivity. This state of psychological disorientation stifles and inhibits creativity and productivity. This is compounded by ridicule from perceived enemies because of the individual's calamity. This desperation is expressed in:

He attacked me and I am running
And people are laughing at me

The subject of ridicule in the song brings to the fore a number of questions that we are unable to provide straight forward answers to. For instance, who could be laughing at the apparent calamity and tragedy of another? Are there issues of possible complicity and alliances with the slave raider? Were there some people who were more vulnerable than others? Were there people within the communities who wielded power and so could not be enslaved? The subject of ridicule evident in the song highlights the power of the enslaver and the powerlessness of the captive, so much so that some group of people (who are obviously more powerful) could possibly be laughing at others amid a tragic event such as the abduction of individuals.

One song that reveals the ways in which a culture reflects upon its experience of enslavement and expresses the trauma of the collectivity is the Buli song "When the slave raider entered our land". In this song, we are introduced to the notions of intrusion and violation of a people's communal space by an outsider. The *Kanbong* (a subject I deal with extensively in Saboro 2013) is metaphorised in these songs as a stranger from far way. He has become such an important cultural symbol of oppression such that memories of his activities in both Bulsa and Kasena communities is often traumatic. In the song, "When the slave raider entered our land", the people of Bulsa relive the experience of a foreign enslaver whose presence within their culture evoke sad memories. The song says :

Kanbonka le jam taayie la,
Kanbonka le jam taayie la,
Ku ŋman ka nalimoa.
Kanbong le bo ti yieŋa po a yigi nuraba,
kuŋman ka nalimoa,
Tama a chali[2] *Kanbonka.*

When the slave raider entered our land
Things are no longer the same
The raider is going round our community capturing people
Things are no longer the same
We are running away from the raider

This song is usually sung as a dirge in view of which its tone and mood are solemn, and it portrays how the people of Bulsa remember the traumatic experience of being captured. In its performance, the first part of the song is usually repeated

2 In Buli language, the word *chali* can also be used to express the subject of fear. In other words, the line "Tama a chali Kanbonka" could also mean we are afraid of the slave raider. The choice of the alternative translation "we are running away from the slave raider" was informed by the specific context of the song seen within the framework of raiding and capture.

twice and the rest of the song lasts about twenty minutes. The first two lines of the song are interrelated in the way they express the notion of the slave raider as an alien and indeed an intruder whose presence constituted a "rape" of individual and communal space. The sense of communal invasion is aptly captured in the slave raider's unwanted entry into the land and the fact that the impact of his presence was so devastating that when he left things were no longer the same. The notions of communal ownership of territory and collective identity are also expressed in *our land* and *our community*. The metaphor of our *land* is informative in that it does not only suggest the physical geography of a territory but also includes the totality of its people and culture. Essentially, the slave raider is perceived as an alien oppressor whose entry into the "land" delineates the issues of power, unlawful access and "force" into a people's territory (see Saboro 2014). As one of my informants, the Chief of Paga, Charles Awiah Awumepaga, told me, "The slave raider often captured people who were on their way to the farm". He went further to suggest that "Most of the time, people numbering about ten on their way to the farm would be ambushed and captured. Sometimes, when people got missing, the natives would attempt going out in search of them but this was a risky venture. The slave raider was dangerous and could kill anybody because the slave raiders were armed".[3]

This informant's memory about slave raids within the communities thus confirms the evidence expressed in the song. The song suggests that as a result of slave raiding, a group of people were denied the opportunity to enjoy their communal space. Similarly, the memories expressed by the song suggest that slave raiding and enslavement violated a people's collective identity and damaged irreparably their collective psyche. This is because the "entering of the land" was through force and aggression. The ill intent of the invasion is seen in the idea of the slave raider going round and "capturing people".

Put another way, the recall of these memories through images of invasion of individual and communal space is traumatic. Associated with the idea of invasion of territorial space is the trauma of being captured. The song's reference to the fact that "the slave raider is going round [the] community capturing people" evokes images of forceful abduction and kidnap. The violation of a person's will and freedom through capture undeniably induces a psyche of fear into victims. Such an alarmist mindset inhibits the free movement of people even within their own land, and stifles creativity, progress and development on the part of both the individual and the collectivity. The informant goes further to suggest that "a lot of people were captured from this area and sent away"[4], thus confirming the song's dominant images of capture and abduction.

How do we read lines in the song that do not lend themselves to a clear-cut interpretation? What meaning, for example, do we ascribe to the song's reference

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3 Interview with Charles Awiah Awumepaga II, paramount chief of Paga traditional area at his palace on the 11 March 2012.

4 Charles Awiah Awumepaga II

to "things are no longer the same"? This deliberate silence or, perhaps, refusal to engage in specificity could suggest ways in which oppressive groups sometimes negotiate their oppressive conditions by choosing to sometimes remain evasive. As the cultural anthropologist Holsey (2008: 7) has pointed out, "silence can ... be a strategy that groups employ in order to negotiate oppressive conditions. In this regard, Holsey has argued, "it can be productive of particular kinds of identities and positive possibilities" and has suggested that "the slave trade", for example, "is evoked in ways other than explicit references to it within public speech" (Holsey: 5).

The silence surrounding "the things that are no longer the same" also defines how certain personal or collective traumatic experiences are sometimes inexpressible though words. This affords us the opportunity to impose meaning based on the broader historical literature relative to the experiences of these people. The violence that often accompanied slave raiding and the capture of people frequently resulted in death and casualties. Among other gruesome things, the rape of women and young girls on their way to fetch water or to farm, and the act of brutally slitting the throats of those who openly resisted their enslavement are, without doubt, "things" that cannot be expressed.

The trauma associated with the remembrance of being captured is heightened by the shooting of arrows as presented in the song below. What is particularly significant in this song is the ways in which the traumatic experience is revealed through violence and aggression. The song says,

Kanbongka jam tong peemayariyari
Kanbong kai le jam tatenglaka tong peemayariyari
yayeeyee!!

Kanbong ka le jam tateng laka tong peema yariyari
ayaayaa aba bababa
Kanbong kai le jam Doning laa te tong peema yariyari
Yayeeyee kanbong kai le jam tatengleka taka peema

Kanbong kai le jam taa teng la nya peema mwan kaa
Aye yeee
Kanbongdek le nyini ta teng la nya peema mwan ka teng po
Ayaayaa aba bababa

Kadek jam teteng ka la nya peema mwan ka tengpo
Aye yeekanbong le jam tateng la nya peema mwa nkaa
A yeekabali ween yee a tebasebi peema tongk ajaa de
Ka ning nyeenya ba waim wan katen gpo
Kanbongk ai ale jam ta teng la tama koma nuer gbelimgbelim
A yeeyee

Me yen kanbong le jue ta jig la nya nura mwan ka tengpo
wayaayaa aba bababa
Kanbong le jue ta jig la nya nura mwan ka tengpo
Aye yeekanbongkai le jam ta teng lenya peema mwan ka
Ayen te koma le weenyee, ate basebi peema tong kalaa
Dege le ning-nyeeba waim wan kai tengyoo

The slave raider who entered our land
Shot arrows indiscriminately

Yes, yes, the slave raider who entered our land
Shot arrows indiscriminately
The slave raider who entered Donning
Shot arrows indiscriminately
Yes, yes, the slave raider who entered our land
Shot arrows
The slave raider who entered our land,
Look no arrows were left
The fierce raider who appeared on our land,
Look, no arrows were left in the land

He came to our land and no arrows were left in the land
Yes, yes, the slave raider who entered our land,
Look, no arrows were left
And he said they should know how to shoot arrows
When he appeared, look, no one was left in the land

The slave raider who entered our land,
Our fathers are dead and finished
I say the slave raider who came to capture,
Look no one was left in the land
The slave raider who came to capture,
Look no one was left in the land
Yes, yes the slave raider who entered our land
Look, no arrows were left
Our fathers have told us to learn how to shoot arrows
Look, nobody was left in the land

This song is normally performed by women. In its performance, the cantor sometimes alternates some of the stanzas with other members of the group. Some of the lines are repeated several times. The song begins with reference to the slave raider's entry into their land. The land, as a community expressed in the song, is a zone of spatiality, a place where common values are shared, and where there is a common identity. The land is essentially a social space and is marked by certain

material and symbolic measures of exclusion. Among a group of people who belong to the same land, there is a sense of oneness and social cohesion usually cemented by kinship and familial ties. In this song, we see the image of the slave raider as an outsider, as a socially excluded category as far as the victim is concerned (See also Saboro 2013, 2014).

The slave raider's presence within the communal space is seen as predatory. Not only does the song allude to the slave raider "entering the land", but also makes explicit reference to the "shooting of arrows". The entering of the land and the shooting of arrows connote an invasion and the usurping of communal space. The shooting of arrows indiscriminately evokes images of terror and aggression, and suggests that no one was immune to captivity and enslavement, hence the indiscriminate shooting of the arrows.

The image of terror is made the more forceful by the use of the expression "fierce raider". By emphasizing that "no arrows were left in the land", look, nobody was left", we get a sense of the extent of communal devastation meted out to the affected community. Slave raiding did indeed affect the very fabric and core of society. It tampered with communal values, undermined the very foundations of human progress, and destroyed family and kinship ties. Societal and family cohesion is nearly impossible when a group of people are constantly exposed to arrows from slave raiders. The reference to "our dead fathers" reveals how the family as a social unit was compromised through captivity and enslavement. In most of these communities and cultures, kinship ties were the institutional glue that bound a person to the community. Hence, the disappearance of a community member through capture as seen in "... the slave raider who came to capture", look no one was left in the land", had serious emotional and demographic consequences for individuals left behind, and indeed the whole society.

The song's insistence that "no one was left", "all our fathers are dead", though it might appear an exaggeration, brings to the fore the view that the sudden disappearance of individuals through raiding and abduction often deprived families of some form of support. What is particularly traumatic in all these cases is the fact that given the bond that kept family members together, it meant that even when one was out of sight owing to abduction, one could still not be forgotten, at least not entirely. In this vein, family members are likely to live with such a traumatic experience for the rest of their lives.

The trauma of bringing a negative experience like captivity to remembrance is further carried in the Kasem song, "The slave raider is in our neighborhood". Like the songs previously discussed, the sense of communal territory is again expressed, this time by the use of the expression "our neighborhood". The song says,

Gwala de debam tetare ywoo
Gwala de debam tetare ne ywoo
Ba ná mage neei
A we gwala de debam tetare ne ywoo

Se bajabanwoŋ
Gwala to debam tetare ne ywoo
Dé yi da dé bwoŋi
Se ba ja ba nwoŋi

The slave raider is in our neighbourhood
The slave raider is in our neighbourhood
I say the slave raider is in our neighbourhood
They want to capture someone
The slave raider is in our neighbourhood
Let us rise and call
So that they come out

This song is performed by the women of Nanea where the Pikworo[5] slave camp is situated. In an interview with Aaron Chigatara, a tour guide and caretaker of the former slave camp at Nania, he told me that "My late father told me that this camp was instituted by one slave raider called Bagao who was dealing in slaves. Bagao came from far way and found this rocky landscape and decided it was conducive for his slave trading business. From here, he often sold his slaves to slave markets, the largest of which was the Salaga slave market" (See picture below showing modern day view of the former slave market at Salaga).[6]

5 Nanea is a small community where the Pikworo slave camp is located about 2km from the Paga town centre in Northern Ghana. Paga is situated about 12km from Navrongo in the Upper East Region of Ghana and it is a crossing point between Ghana and Burkina Faso. Slaving activities reached their peak in this area around 1840 and 1870. The Pikworo slave camp has rocky outgrowths where slaves captured during raids and others brought from other West African countries were confined until they were matched to the Salaga slave market for sale to Asante slave dealers.

6 Interview with Aaron Chigatara on 10th March 2012.

Figure 3. *Picture showing the former slave market in Salaga*. Photo: Author.

The message of the song can then be read at two levels: the first level announces the slave raider's presence within the community and the second is a distress call for members of the community to be on the alert. In this song, the subject of being captured re-emerges, reinforcing the idea of communal invasion. Capturing evokes images of seizure or taking possession through force. The song suggests that although the slave raider is in the neighbourhood and capturing people, there is communal action. There is a clarion call for people to come out and resist the enemy. It is a call to action, thereby suggesting that people did not remain passive and apathetic to their plight of enslavement. They often took action- they fought back. One of my informants at Nakong a Kasena community was emphatic that "Our people also fought the slave raiders. The people of Yelenia (a small community near Nakong village) particularly resisted the slave raiders. Their leader was called Amonsi". (Interview with Anasemyem 2016).

In the Kasem song, "when they chase you", we again observe how a community reflects on and indeed remembers the constant pursuing of its people by slave raiders. The song thus re-echoes the notion of victimization evident in the constant fleeing of people from slave raiders. The song says,

Ba Na Dege-M Naa
Ba do ba jaana
Gwala kam do ka jaana
Ba ná dege-m jaana
Ba ná dege-m naa

Nmo za-n kwaane n duri se n yi chulu tei
Ba do ba jaana
Gwale sem do se jaana
Ba ná dege naa
Nmo za-n kwaane n duri se n yi chulu tei

When they chase you
They chase to capture
The slave raider chases to capture
When they chase you, fly
When they chase you
Just run till you reach a sacred place
They chase to capture
The slave raiders chase to capture
When they chase you
Just run till you reach a sacred place

The song presents an interesting structure. It introduces what seems to be the most obvious aim of the slave raider: to "chase and "capture". It then offers well-meaning advice on what one should do when one is pursued by slave raiders. There is an admonition to "fly" and "just run until you reach a sacred place". Clearly, communities under threat of enslavement did not stand aloof. They often chose to evade capture by adopting counter measures to outwit slave raiders. Two significant lexical items recur in the song, "chase" and "capture". Metaphorically, the use of "chase" implies that slave raiding was akin to a hunting expedition undertaken with the sole aim of capturing a prey. This is expressed in "when they chase you, they chase to capture". As already mentioned, capturing was always accompanied by force and violence (or the threat of violence).

The act of chasing to capture, as articulated by the song, puts the captive in the exclusive hands of the captor, a process which involved the imposition of distance and socialisation on the captive. Thus, the captive invariably loses his personal human rights and cultural identity. Unarguably, the practice of forcibly capturing a person or any group of people and transporting them to an alien environment using violent means is a traumatic experience for both the individual and the group as whole.

Raiding and captivity not only sought to circumscribe the movement of people physically, but the very process of raiding itself was always intended to imprison one's spirit and produce a subservient culture within the raided. It induced a kind of "psychological claustrophobia" that made the victim yearn not only for freedom of movement but spiritual escape. This desire to escape is expressed in the song using the metaphor of "flying" when pursued by the slave raiders.

"Flying" as used in the song is of symbolic significance. This metaphor is used to express both the real and symbolic quest for freedom at all cost. "Running" now appears inadequate and a less effective means of escape. The use of "flying"

also connotes desperation, and provides victims a means of psychologically escaping from the real experience of being raided. It is an opportunity to occupy a symbolic space in the realm beyond the physical where no slave raider can possibly reach, a realm within the imagination that defies inhibition. Reference to "running to a sacred place" is also worthy of note. In African traditional religious thought and philosophy, sacred spaces are regarded as places of refuge. Such places would normally include a shrine, an altar, or a grove. In the event of calamity, a person who is able to run to such a place is shielded from trouble. During interviews, informants often mentioned specific deities within these cultures as having played redemptive roles in helping people to escape the slave raiders. The Bulsa, for example, often mentioned Azaksuk whose shrine is located in Fiisa, a suburb of Sandema in Bulsa. The Kasena also often mentioned Zambao and the river deity Kukula.[7] The use of "sacred place" also connotes a place that transcends the physical. It could possibly be a realm within the imagination, a symbolic and mental space connoting peace and freedom- a mental space that cannot possibly be raided.

Some of the songs hint on the often controversial subject of indigenous complicity and the songs below maybe a pointer to possible complicity. Oral accounts suggest that communities were often not oblivious of how some of their neighbors masterminded the sale of their own to slave raiders. There are still community memories of how particular households collaborated with slave raiders. During field interviews, respondents were however, often reluctant to be more specific for fear of digging up "old wounds". The activities of the slave dealer Bagao for example although very little is known about him is believed to have been responsible for setting up the slave camp where the songs "years ago they sold one" another and "slaves have market" were performed.

A recurrent theme in some of the songs is the economics of trade expressed using the metaphor of "market". Enslavement and the transactions involving slaves provided a context where the captive was seen as a commodity. As historian Meillassoux (1986: 291) had remarked, "It is through the market that the common state of slaves, as a social class is defined..." Specific variants of commodification in the songs are expressed through lexical items such as, 'selling', 'being sold', and 'slaves having value'. Indeed, the theme of buying and selling as a means of enslavement is given prominence in the song, "years ago, they sold one another'.

Reference to "selling" is significant because it underscores the very nature of the slave enterprise, one which was underpinned by the basic principles of objectification and commodification. Raiding and enslavement sought to dehumanize, objectify and commodity the individual. It transformed captives into disposable and exchange commodities in view of which the individual had to be first regarded as an object and a commodity that could be traded for profit.

7 Interview with Akanse, AKA Assemblyman on 19th July 2006 in his house.

Figure 4. *Photo showing women at Nania near paga performing at the pikworo slave camp. These women performed the songs "years ago they sold one another" and "slaves have market" (economic value)*. Photo: Author.

During fieldwork in the Nania community, the song 'years ago they sold one another' was performed by the women shown in (fig. 4) with one of them serving as a lead cantor who introduces the initial part of the song for the others to join in the chorus. The song says,

Deem tuba yeigi daane
Deém tuba yeigi daa nemona
Ba bwoi kabɛ neei
A we faŋa to bayeigi daane neei

Ba bwoi kabɛ neei
Leile bia ba jaŋe se ba lɔre neei
Ba na yeigi mɛ
N ná ti n yiga mmo za-n kwaane n ba
Se n lɔre yaga dɛ.

Years ago they sold one another
In the olden days they sold one another
They call them slaves
I say in those days they sold one another

They call them slaves
Today children do not care to know
Where the marketing was done

When you are ready, you try and come
So that you will know market day

The song confronts the subject of the slave trade rather forcefully by stating emphatically that slaves were sold in the olden days. It alludes to the idea of marketing and the market value of slaves. Indeed, "marketing" and "market value" can be considered business oriented metaphors. They convey images of commercial transaction and trade. The song thus presents the ways in which the Kasena, for example, remember their forbearers through specific images of the captive as an object that can be disposed of as and when the captor wishes.

In the song 'Slaves have market', the theme of the captive's commercial value is again expressed using the metaphor of "market". The song states,

Kabɛ jege yeiga
Kabɛ jege yeiga
Gwala deem maa zege chwoŋa ne
Kabɛ jege yeiga
Kabɛ jege yeiga
Gwala deém maa seigi chwoŋa ne
Kabɛ jege yeiga

Slaves have market
The slave raider is standing on the way
Slaves have market
Slaves have market
The slave raider is standing on the way
Slaves have market

In its performance, the cantor alternates the first two lines by hitting on a calabash to produce a rhythmic pattern. The rest of the chorus in the last two lines is sung by the rest of the group. The rhythm produced by the hitting of the calabash is intended to enhance the musical quality of the song and sometimes makes it easy for audience participation. The metaphor of "market" in this song underscores the commercial value of the captive. That is, the captive was stripped of his/her social value, severed from kith and kin, and made available in exchange for currency. The symbolic relevance of "market" is one which suggests that it was nearly impossible for captives to return to their previous place of dwelling. The line, "the slave raider is standing on the way" points to a possible enslavement strategy. Thus, the slave raider has laid ambush, and is ready to attack or capture. Indeed, oral accounts in these communities indicated that slave raiders sometimes hid themselves in places where they could easily prey upon unsuspecting victims.[8]

[8] Field notes 2005, 2006 and 2012. Interviews and focus group discussions after song recordings always brought out community memories about ways in which slave raiders often preyed upon people on their way to the farms, or women on their way to the streams to fetch

The song's reference to the slave raider "standing on the way" presents us with a vivid image of a predator waiting to pounce on its prey, an attack which is usually accompanied by violence and aggression.

The distinctive feature of the captive's powerlessness is seen in the violence associated with his capture and enslavement. Offering insights into the nature and constituent elements of power and its relationship with slavery, sociologist Patterson (1982) has identified three facets of power relations, namely the social, the psychological, and the cultural. Of the three, the social facet which Patterson suggests involves the use or threat of violence in the control of one person by another, fits within the context of the slave raiding experience within these cultures. Slave raiding, as clearly shown in this song, was a relationship of extreme domination and the use of coercive force. The subject of ridicule stemming from someone's predicament is again reinforced in the Kasem song "he weeps helplessly".

O kwi bworo bworo
O kwi bworo bworo
O dona maa maa mɔm se ba yaa lage bɛ
Mo o nɔɔno maama
Kayela mo o nɔɔno maama eei
O nɔɔna maama
Ko mo ne pa o kwia o yera ba zura ywoo
Mo o nɔɔno maama
Ko mo mo pa o kwia o yera ba zura naa
Mo o nɔɔno maama
Kayela mo o nɔɔno maama

He Weeps Helplessly
He is crying uncontrollably
His enemies are happy and making fun
That is the only person he has
Brave man! That is his only person eei
His heart is burning for that is his only person
His only person taken away
That is why he is crying helplessly
That is his only person
Brave man! That is his only person

In the song, we are presented with a person's lamentation over the loss of a loved one who has been abducted. The song expresses the pain and trauma of captivity in the memories of the people within these communities as they reflect on the

water. For example, James Agalic (70 years of age) was interviewed on 10th September2005 in Sandema and Joseph Banape Afagache, chief of Nakong, (68 years of age) was also interviewed at his palace on 31st March 2012. They recounted some of these community memories.

traumatic experience of enslavement. The pain of loss is particularly intense as the victim whose kin is taken away is crying uncontrollably. Even more significant is the fact that the individual who has been captured is the "only" person in the life of the one lamenting. That one's "only person" can be taken away underscores the oppressive nature and ruthlessness of the slave enterprise, one that disrupts the family unit and destroys kith and kin. Worse still, the song emphasises that despite the fact that it is one's "only person" who has been captured, one's enemies take pleasure in such an unfortunate situation, and so they make fun of one. The feeling of pain and anguish is given expression through the tactile image "his heart is burning for his only person".

The trauma of captivity and its accompanied force and violence is expressed through the Kasem song discussed below. The song says,

Kanbɔŋa le natera ywoo
Kanbɔŋa le natera ywoo
Debam berewa le seo ywoo
Gazarená le seo o bere wɛna bana duri ba seiga
Beyere wa ma dane o vere nabwona wonnu
Gazare ná le seo o bere wɛ na ba na duri ba seiga
Beyere wa ma dane o vere nabwona wonnu
Gɔl-kanbɔŋa le natera naa
Debam beyere wa le seo o bere wɛ-ɛɛ-ɛ

The slave raider has removed his sandals
The slave raider has removed his sandals
We shall also remove a cutlass
When Gazare removes a cutlass and shows it up
People run into hiding
Strength is used to rob the poor
When Gazare removes a cutlass and shows it up
People run into hiding
Strength is used to rob the poor
A powerful slave raider has removed his sandals
We shall also remove a cutlass and show it up

During my fieldwork in Chaina Katiu, a small community within the Kasena cultural area, two friends performed this song. The song opens with a symbolic sign attributed to the slave raider. The slave raider's removal of his sandals symbolically presents an image of the slave raider's preparedness to undertake the task of raiding. Although the second line gives a hint of the theme of resistance by the people themselves, the issues of force, violence and aggression are brought to the fore in this song. The name of one of the slave raiders, Gazare, is mentioned, thereby confirming evidence from historical sources about the Zabarima slave

raiders, one of whom was Gazare. The song suggests that when Gazare wields his cutlass and shows it up, people run into hiding. Gazare's cutlass is thus a symbol of aggression. It is used as a tool to perpetuate violence in a bid to facilitate the capturing process. Gazare's symbolic gesture of showing the cutlass up is informative and raises a concern. Do we suppose, for instance, that such a gesture was suggestive of an act of dependence on a supernatural power or a prayer to a deity for assistance in executing a mission? Since the songs do not often present the perspectives of the slave raider, we can only infer that the potential captives probably saw this symbolic gesture as an act of seeking divine approval and sanction (by the captors) for their enslavement.

The theme of "running" as a direct consequence of predation re-emerges in this song. Invariably, the act of running away from slave raiders produced in these cultures "an experience of motion without a discernible direction or destination".[9] Captives were often oblivious of where they were running to. This condition of running without direction and with no destination in mind is both an individual and a collective traumatic experience that is inexpressible through words. What makes the memory of the experience within this song traumatic is not only seen in Gazare's use of the cutlass as an instrument of enslavement, but also ways in which the song suggests, "Strength is used to rob the poor". Clearly, the use of "strength" in this context is the outward display of power. The song thus reinforces the dynamics of power over powerlessness.

The Kasem word *vere,* which is translated as "to rob" or "to take by force", connotes the use of force and aggression to seize something from someone. Reference to the poor is also instructive because the word used in this context does not only suggest the notion of economic poverty, but also captures images of the vulnerable, the weak, and the defenseless. These would normally include children, women and old people. Although slave dealers were usually not interested in the old, the images of communal plunder and pillage often affected old people as well, as they often lost property such as foodstuff and livestock as well as their children who were their economic security.

The image of the "powerful slave raider" in the song brings to the fore the institutional and structural dynamics of raiding and dealing in slaves. Raided communities often saw the outward display of power exhibited by the slave raiders not only in their ability to "chase and capture", but also in their use of weapons such as guns and ammunition. The introduction of guns and gun powder scholars have suggested, transformed the nature of warfare and captivity, especially during the latter part of the nineteenth century when slave raiding became endemic in these areas. Hitherto, bows and arrows were the common

9 Although historian Stephanie Smallwood alludes to this metaphor of motion without a discernible direction and destination within the context of the transatlantic slave experience as it applied to captives, it is nonetheless an apt metaphor for the experience of people who experienced enslavement through raiding. See Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to America Diaspora* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), Ch. 5. p.122.

weapons of warfare. Indeed, one of the images of the Asante Kingdom within northern Ghanaian consciousness is its association with modern weaponry.

"Running" as the songs allude to, ultimately produced a psychology of defeat and victimization seen clearly through the lens of always being pursued. In effect, this robs individuals and the collectivity of the power to have control over their own destinies. The intimidation arising from being pursued produces fear and a general sense of insecurity and instability. These variants ultimately inhibit and stifle individual and collective creative efforts and seriously undermine the progress and development of any society. The song under review does not only reveal the sense of "running", but also suggest that constant running often resulted in both individual and communal dislocation.

6. The Trauma of Dislocation

The subject of individual and communal dislocation as a consequence of enslavement is not entirely new within the literature. Indeed, scholars, particularly historians, have long articulated these themes through the bulk of historical writing. What is silent in these sources, however, are the ways in which marginalized communities often perceived and responded to their experiences of dislocation. Specific lines within some songs such as "he attacked me and I have no place to stay", "we are running away while abandoning our children", "I am running for my dear life", "we are running away from the slave raider", are all examples of both individual and communal laments over displacement as a result of the slave raider's predatory activity. While some lines express individual sentiments, others articulate the common predicament of the collectivity under conditions of enslavement. Thus, these songs bring into sharp focus the issue of an "internal diaspora"—the dispersal of people within their own country but in this instance, a displacement to a geographical location that is probably very alien and hostile to what captives were originally familiar with. The complexity of this internal dislocation was hinted when one of my informants, Anasemyem told me that "some of our people fled as a result of slave raids to Kumasi and Accra" (major cities in the South of Ghana).

7. Conclusion

In an attempt to bring to the fore the voices of communities who were hitherto marginalised in terms of how their voices help to shape the entire historical narrative, this article sought to examine the ways in which the Bulsa and Kasena of Northern Ghana through their songs and oral traditions continue to remember and re-live the threats of slave raiding and enslavement within their collective consciousness. Overall these songs, as articulated by these communities, promise to add to our store of knowledge of the cultural and historical process of

enslavement highlighting significantly the trauma of capture and captivity among the Bulsa and Kasena of Ghana. The songs have presented evidence from the perspective of communities that were under the constant threats of captivity and enslavement to suggest that the experience of slave raiding and captivity threatened their central communality and the collective remembrance of these experiences constituted a wound of a profound sort. What is also revealing about the experiences of these cultures relative to their history of captivity is that in spite of the tragedy of enslavement, they survived pain and challenged their enslavement and remained resolute in their resolve to continue to fight oppression in whatever form.

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INTERVEWS

Interview with *Aaron Chigatra*, tour guide at the Pikworo slave camp, about 26 years of age at time of interview at Pikworo Slave Camp; recorded by Emmanuel Saboro**,** 8 March 2012.

Interview with *Ali Raymond Achengba*, a community elder about 60 years of age at the time of interview; recorded by Emmanuel Saboro, 16 August 2017. Achengba spoke Kasem.

Interview with *Charles Awum Paga II*, chief of Paga, 65 years of age at the time of interview at his palace; recorded by Emmanuel Saboro, 11 March 2012. Paga spoke Kasem.

Interview with *Anaseenyem*, a community elder, about 65 years at the time of interview at a house in Nakong, a Kasena area; recorded by Emmanuel Saboro, 2

February 2016. Anasemyem spoke Kasem although he was literate and a retired school teacher.

Interview with *Puadura Wemegura*, clan head, about 54 years at the time of interview at his house in Navrongo; recorded by Emmanuel Saboro, 10 March 2012. Wemegura spoke Kasem although he was literate with a University degree.

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