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Research Article

Historical Consciousness and Contemporary Significance: A Narrative-Analytical Study of Colonial Memory in Cape Coast, Ghana

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

Specifically, this study explored the perceptions and collective memories regarding Ghana's colonial past among individuals, ways colonial memories are preserved and transmitted and the current effects of colonial rule in Ghana. This study employed qualitative research method and through a purposive sampling technique a sample of 12 participants were interviewed and the data was thematically analyzed. With regard to the findings, this study found that Ghanaians perception and collective memory of their colonial past are dominated by the slave trade and its impacts, loss of freedom and exploitation, and historical injustice and hindrance to development. Again, this study found that oral traditions and storytelling, historical sites as educational tools and written historical accounts are key mechanisms for preserving and transmitting Ghanaian colonial collective memory. Finally, this study found that colonialism left a mixed legacy with both positive and negative outcomes. It is therefore recommended that educational curricula should incorporate a balanced and nuanced narrative of colonial history to help in acknowledging both the negative impacts and the contributions to the nation's development. This study concludes that Ghanaians' perceptions and collective memory of their colonial past are profoundly shaped by the impacts of slavery, historical injustices and the dual legacies of colonialism, highlighting both its advancements and detriments."

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European expansion into the world, like the Russian, Chinese, and Japanese into Asia, the Arab into Africa or any other expansion, even when it was meant to be peaceful, often amounted to a violent clash of cultures and was implicitly connected with race and sooner or later with economic exploitation (Veracini, 2022). "Colonialism, a system where powerful countries dominated weaker regions for economic, political, and cultural gain (Loomba, 2015; Veracini, 2022), shaped much of the world's history. Globally, colonialism began in the 15th century when European powers like Spain and Portugal sought to expand their influence by exploring new territories (Rodney, 2018). This era, often called the Age of Discovery, led to the colonization of the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Colonizers justified their actions through ideologies like the civilizing mission, claiming they were bringing progress to uncivilized lands (Loomba, 2015). Over time, colonialism shifted to exploit resources and establish markets for European industries. The Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries strengthened colonial expansion, as countries like Britain and France sought raw materials and cheap labor. This created a global system of inequality, where colonies were dependent on their colonizers (Loomba, 2015; Veracini, 2022)."

In Africa, colonialism started in the late 19th century during the Scramble for Africa, when European powers partitioned the continent at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 (Boahen, 1987; Rodney, 2018). The British, French, Portuguese, and Belgians, among others, exploited African lands for agriculture and minerals while disrupting local governance systems. "In Ghana, formerly the Gold Coast, colonialism began with European trade along the coast in the 15th century and formalized with British control in 1874 (Howard, 2023). The British sought gold, cocoa, and timber while introducing Western education and Christianity. However, colonial policies marginalized traditional authorities and exploited local resources for European benefit. On the other hand, colonialism in Ghana introduced formal Western education, which expanded literacy and provided skills for modern governance and professions. Additionally, infrastructure such as railways, roads, and ports were developed to support trade, some of which continue to benefit the country today (Adu-Gyamfi *et al.*, 2021). While colonialism in Ghana yielded certain economic and social developments, it also ignited fervent resistance culminating in independence in 1957, marking a pivotal moment in sub-Saharan African decolonization (Adu-Gyamfi *et al.*, 2021; Howard, 2023).

Despite this historical significance, understanding of the enduring influence of colonial rule on Ghanaian historical consciousness and contemporary society remains less explored. Memory studies highlight that collective memory differs from official history. Scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs (1980) explained that memories are shaped by social groups (Grande & Migliorati, 2025), while Pierre Nora (1989) introduced the concept of *lieux de mémoire* places where memories are preserved when lived experiences fade. Foscarini (2017) further distinguished between communicative memory shared informally within families and communities and cultural memory, preserved through institutions, texts, and monuments. Paul Connerton (1989) added that rituals and embodied

practices sustain memory across generations (Mussatayeva & Yermagambetova, 2022). These perspectives reveal that memory operates through multiple channels including archives and official records represent institutionalized memory, whereas oral stories, rituals and local customs embody lived, popular memory. Understanding colonial legacies in Ghana, therefore, requires engaging both the written and the lived forms of remembering.

In Cape Coast, the politics of remembering colonialism reflects this divide. Official narratives promoted by UNESCO and state heritage institutions present the forts and castles as global symbols of the transatlantic slave trade (Abungu & Ndoro, 2022). However, local communities hold more complex memories expressed through oral traditions, shrine rituals and daily conversations that recount suffering, resistance and survival (Rodney, 2018). Ethnographic studies show that these community memories often clash with tourist-oriented or state narratives (Bos, 2009; Apter, 2017). For many residents, the castles are not only symbols of trauma but also living spaces tied to commerce, religion and identity. This contrast shows that collective memory is dynamic and contested shaped by both heritage management and community practices. Ignoring these local interpretations risks turning memory into a tool for tourism rather than a reflection of lived experience. As such, this study intended to fill this gap by exploring the perceptions and collective memories of individuals in Cape Coast regarding Ghana's colonial past. Specifically sought to analyze the mechanisms through which colonial memory is preserved and transmitted and understand the contemporary impact of colonial rule in the locality. In short, studying Cape Coast from a memory studies perspective helps us see three things. One, memory comes from both institutions and communities. Two, sites like Cape Coast Castle act as contested *lieux de mémoire*. Three, rituals and oral practices reveal local meanings that official archives omit. This approach deepens analysis of colonial legacies. It links historical facts to lived experience and political struggles over meaning. To achieve this study's aim, the following research questions were addressed. (1) What are the perceptions and collective memories regarding Ghana's colonial past among individuals? (2) How are colonial memories preserved and transmitted in Ghana? (3) What are the current effects of colonial rule in Ghana?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concepts

Clarifying conceptual issues provide a comprehensive understanding of any phenomena under study. "In this study, the two main concepts (colonial memory and historical consciousness) have been explained below. According to Seixas (2006), historical consciousness refers to an individual's or group's understanding of the past and how it influences their present identity and future aspirations. This concept is rooted in the idea that historical events are not just memories but frameworks that shape a community's cultural and social dynamics (Rüsen, 2004; Grever & Adriaansen, 2019). By promoting evidenced based decision-making and societal growth historical consciousness places emphasizes on the usefulness of critically interpreting historical narratives. Thus,



the stories of pre-colonial civilizations and resistance to foreign rule contribute to a sense of dignity and identity in African societies. As argued by Scholars like Assmann (2011), historical consciousness grant to societies the ability to remember important occasions and align them to immediate situations, fostering collective resilience."

The second concept, colonial memory, "emphasizes on the shared recollections of imperial experiences and their persisting impacts on societies after colonialism. As asserted by Jeurgens and Karabinos (2020), inherent in colonial memory are memories which often highlight oppression, resistance, and transformation. In the idea of Fanon (1963), colonial memory is useful in understanding the socio-economic and cultural disparities that remain in nations after colonialism (Obeng-Odoom, 2016). For instance, the implementation of foreign languages as official languages and the persistent control of colonial economic structures in are the prolonged effects of colonial rule. As emphasized by Mbembe (2001), tackling colonial past allows individual societies to critique and oppose systems that endorse inequality, paving the way for a more harmonious future. In this study, both historical consciousness and colonial memory act as essential tools for reflection, helping Ghanaians to navigate their past to build a better future."

2.2. Perceptions and collective memories of ghanaians regarding their colonial past

Influenced by the country's experiences during the transatlantic slave trade, European colonization, and eventual independence, Ghana's colonial past provide different perceptions and shared memories among its people (Obeng-Odoom, 2016). "For instance, a study by Mouafo *et al.* (2024) reports that some Ghanaians hold negative memories of the colonial period, particularly regarding the slave trade, which forcibly uprooted millions of Africans, including Ghanaians, to be enslaved in foreign lands. With achieves proving the dehumanization and exploitation of Africans for the economic benefit of European powers, this period is recalled as a time of immense suffering and loss of human dignity (Mouafo *et al.*, 2024). Slave forts such as Elmina and Cape Coast castles for instance serve as painful recollection of the dehumanization experienced by enslaved individuals. Additionally, Addo (2011) note that colonial policies often marginalized local communities and disrupted traditional governance systems, leaving a legacy of socio-economic inequalities. However, studies also report positive perceptions, as some individuals view the colonial era as a time that introduced infrastructure, formal education, and modern governance structures to Ghana (Owusu-Ansah, 2023; Addo, 2011). For instance, a study by Mouafo *et al.* (2024) reports that colonial railways and schools are seen as significant contributions to the country's modernization, yet many argue that these developments primarily served the interests of the colonizers rather than the colonized. Overall, Ghana's collective memory of its colonial past reflects a mix of pride, sorrow, and critical reflection, illustrating the complexity of its historical experiences."

2.3. Ways colonial memories are preserved and transmitted in Ghana

Including Ghana colonial rule left a long lasting effect on many

countries, where shared mind of the colonial period are preserved and shared via various mediums. "Studies in Ghana assert that colonial memory in Ghana is preserved and transmitted through various cultural, historical, and educational practices (Addo, 2011; Obeng-Odoom, 2016). As reported by Apoh (2013), one significant way is through the preservation of historical monuments and sites such as Cape Coast and Elmina Castles, which serve as vivid reminders of the transatlantic slave trade and European colonization. As per Apoh (2013) report, these venues are often utilized for educational tours and ceremonies to equip younger generations comprehend the country's colonial past. Studies also provide that oral traditions play a useful role, as stories of those who experienced the colonial are passed down via generations by elders, maintaining memories of resistance and cultural survival alive (Ofosu-Asare, 2024)."

According to Mensah (2022) archives including colonial-era documents, records, and artifacts are preserved in museums, enabling researchers and the public to have access to Ghana's colonial past or history. "Schools also transmit colonial memory through history lessons that include topics on colonization and its impact on Ghana's development (Mensah, 2022). These methods collectively ensure that colonial memories are preserved and shared across generations."

2.4. The contemporary impacts of colonial rule in Ghana

As per historian scholars, colonial rule in Ghana, which lasted from the late 19th century until independence in 1957, has had a lasting impact on the country's development, both positive and negative (Apoh, 2013; Obeng-Odoom, 2016). "As reported by Abdelfadeel (2021), the colonial administration introduced infrastructure, such as roads, railways, and ports, which laid the foundation for modern economic activities. These developments helped integrate different regions of Ghana, facilitating trade and communication. Aidoo (2019) also provides that an increase in literacy rates and the creation of a more educated workforce in Ghana is as a result of the British's formal education system that expanded access to education, particularly in urban areas. These institutions and advancements created opportunities for economic growth and development, which continue to shape the country today. However, colonial rule also had significant negative consequences for Ghana."

"According to Anyidoho and Kpessa-Whyte (2023), the British exploitation of the country's natural resources, such as gold and cocoa, benefited the colonial powers but left the local economy heavily reliant on the export of raw materials, hindering industrialization and long-term economic stability. Additionally, report provide that the colonial system imposed artificial borders that disregarded the existing cultural and ethnic divisions, contributing to later political and social conflicts (Aidoo, 2019). The legacy of colonialism also shaped the political structure, leaving behind a centralized system that concentrated power in the hands of a few, which has led to challenges in governance and political instability in post-independence Ghana (Anyidoho & Kpessa-Whyte, 2023). Thus, while colonial rule brought certain benefits, its long-lasting negative effects are still evident in Ghana's political and economic challenges."



2.5. Theoretical review

This study utilized the Collective Memory Theory and the Post-Colonial theory for understanding the phenomenon under study. “The Collective Memory Theory was developed by Maurice Halbwachs in the early 20th century (de Saint-Laurent, 2018). Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist, is credited with the development of the Collective Memory Theory. The Collective Memory Theory provides that memory is not solely an individual process but is socially constructed within groups. In the view of Halbwachs as provided in Saint-Laurent (2018), the shared idea people hold are influenced by their own social context, which influence how they recall incidents, interpret the past and form shared identities. Memory is subject to the social environment and shared encounters of a group of individuals over time but not static. As its core tenants, the Collective Memory Theory differentiated between individual memory, which is personal and subjective and collective memory, which is shared and shaped by social groups, communities, and institutions (de Saint-Laurent, 2018).”

Within the framework of the Collective Memory Theory and in relation to this study we are able to comprehend how the people of Ghana collectively remember and preserve the history of colonialism. “The theory opines that colonial memory is not just an individual recollection but is created, maintained, and transmitted on through social entities or structures such as families, communities, schools and public institutions (Weedon & Jordan, 2012). In Ghana for instance, colonial memory are communicated through oral traditions, historical sites like forts and castles, educational curricula, and national commemorations. The way these memories are collectively framed within various societies influence how younger generations understand and perceive the impact of colonial rule.”

Halbwachs' differentiation between personal and shared memory can help explain why certain aspects of colonial history may be recalled or forgotten depending on the dominant social forces in a given period of time. “This reveals how colonial past is selectively transferred and what it means for social and political entities in present Ghana. For instance, the colonial heritages including power structures, land dispossession, or resistance could manifest differently based on how the community collectively remembers, perceive and interprets those experiences (Weedon & Jordan, 2012).”

Edward Said in 1978 through his seminal work *Orientalism* introduced the Post-colonial theory, which examines the persistent effects of colonialism on societies who are victims of colonial rule (Gandhi, 2018). “The theory provides that colonial rule established a distinction between the West (colonizer) and the East (colonized). This dichotomy describe East (colonized nations) as inferior and uncivilized to justify exploitation and control. Other proponents, including Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, expanded the Post-colonial theory by addressing issues of hybridity, identity, and the marginalization of native voices (Gandhi, 2018). The application of Bhabha's concept of hybridity in this study helps explain the dual relationship Ghanaians maintain with colonial legacies. Rather than viewing colonial influence as entirely rejected or fully accepted, hybridity reveals how both coexist within the same social reality. Ghanaians

reject the oppressive symbolism of colonialism yet continue to depend on its inherited infrastructures such as education, governance, and law for modern functioning. This duality reflects a negotiated identity where resistance and adaptation occur simultaneously. For instance, the continued use of the English language and colonial-era institutions shows reliance, while their reinterpretation to serve national development goals reflects rejection. Through hybridity, we understand that postcolonial Ghana is not shaped by simple opposition to colonialism but by a complex process of reworking and redefining colonial structures to assert autonomy and cultural continuity. As reported by Gandhi (2018), the post-colonial theory posits that colonial ideologies remains and function in modern social, political, and cultural structures, perpetuating inequalities and shaping contemporary realities.”

By employing it in this study, the Post-colonial theory indicates how colonial legacies persist to influence Ghana's socio-economic structures and cultural identity. “Leaving Ghana with long standing structural dependencies, the theory reveals how colonialism imposed economic systems that prioritized resource extraction. In cultural context, the colonial education and governance systems impeded indigenous knowledge and traditions, creating a persisting sense of cultural dislocation. By utilizing post-colonial theory, the current study analyzes how these colonial legacies manifest in present-day Ghana, shaping its development trajectory and identity (Childs & Williams, 2014).”

The literature above presents both agreements and disagreements, highlighting its complex and diverse influence. Scholars generally agree that colonialism profoundly shaped Ghana's cultural, political, and social identity (Addo, 2011; Obeng-Odoom, 2016). “Colonial-era educational systems and urban planning continue to influence the nation's development, as evidenced by the persistence of colonial narratives in curricula and the preservation of historical sites like the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles (Apoh, 2013; Ofosu-Asare, 2024). However, scholars also differ on the extent to which colonialism has had both positive and negative impacts. Some argue that colonial rule brought beneficial infrastructure, education, and economic integration (Abdelfadeel, 2021; Aidoo, 2019), while others emphasize the detrimental effects, such as economic dependency, political instability, and the imposition of artificial borders (Anyidoho & Kpessa-Whyte, 2023). These contrasting views reflect ongoing debates about colonialism's legacy. The general conclusion drawn is that while colonial rule facilitated certain modern advancements, its lasting negative consequences continue to shape Ghana's political and economic realities. The Collective Memory Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how these collective memories are constructed and transmitted through social structures, influencing contemporary political and social movements in Ghana (de Saint-Laurent, 2018; Weedon & Jordan, 2012).”

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study area

The primary data for this study was collected from residents from Cape Coast. “According to literature, Cape Coast can be identified as a historic centre of colonial encounters and



subsequent anti-colonial movements, being the initial point of European colonization in Ghana (Feinberg, 1989; Geiss 1968). Additionally, Cape Coast remains a significant area for the Fanti ethnic group (Geiss, 1968), a group deeply intertwined with colonial history. For instance, during the mid-19th century, the Fanti aided the Komenda people in their military conflict against Dutch colonial expansion (Geiss, 1968). Intellectually, the Fanti spearheaded anti-colonial movements, as seen in the establishment of the Fanti Confederation (1867-71) and the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) in 1897 (Geiss 1968). Notable anti-colonial figures in Ghanaian history, such as Attoh Ahuma, Casely Hayford, King Ghartey IV, Mensa Sarbah, and Ottobah Cugoana, who hailed from Cape Coast, contributed to the nationalist struggle against European colonizers (Geiss, 1968). This rich history makes the Fanti people of Cape Coast a particularly intriguing subject of study, given their prolonged interaction with and opposition to colonialism. Cape Coast served as Ghana's cultural and intellectual hub until 1897 (Geiss, 1968)."

3.2. Methods and design

In this study a qualitative research approach was embraced. "A qualitative research is a form of social responsive action that stresses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals in order to gain a deeper understanding of the surrounding circumstances (Flick, 2014). In relation to the qualitative approach, a case study design was utilized. A case study design is a qualitative research design that involves an in-depth examination of a specific subject, group, or phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2017). It is relevant to this study as it allows for a detailed exploration of colonial memory in Cape Coast by analyzing historical narratives, personal experiences, and cultural influences. This approach provides a rich understanding of how colonial events are remembered and their contemporary significance to the local community (Yin, 2017). Through a purposive sampling 12 residents comprising of 3 historians, 4 fishermen, 3 administrators and 2 lecturers were interviewed. Three historians were included because of their expertise in documenting and analyzing colonial events, providing a scholarly perspective on the subject. Four fishermen were selected as representatives of local communities, offering firsthand knowledge of how colonialism impacted traditional livelihoods and social structures. Three administrators were chosen because of their involvement in policy-making and governance, allowing them to share insights on the administrative legacy of colonial rule. Finally, two lecturers were included for their academic contributions to historical discourse, ensuring that the study captured perspectives from an educational standpoint. Initial identification was done through referrals from key informants and local leaders who had knowledge of individuals with relevant insights. Background checks were conducted to ensure that selected respondents had direct or indirect involvement in historical narratives, governance, or cultural practices related to the colonial past. From here, an official letter was dispatched to a range of historians, fishermen, administrators and lecturers located within the Cape Coast metropolitan area, soliciting

their willingness to engage in the research. Within this correspondence, an inquiry was made to ascertain whether the prospective participants possessed expertise in the domains of colonial history of Ghana. Subsequently, the selection of interviewees hinged on the responses and feedback garnered from the distributed letters, with a deliberate selection of 12 Participants." Participants were not individuals who lived during the colonial period but were either historians or descendants of those who experienced colonial rule. The study areas within the selected case, Cape Coast, comprised of the fishing coast stretch of the city for the fishing folks such as Shama and Port Cities and other workers from the city's administrative stretch and the academies from the University of Cape Coast (UCC) Campus. With regards to the inclusion criteria, participants must have direct knowledge, academic expertise, or lived experiences related to colonial memory in Cape Coast and individuals must belong to one of the selected categories: historians, fishermen, administrators, or lecturers. On the other hand, this study excluded individuals without sufficient knowledge or engagement with colonial memory and those who do not reside or work in Cape Coast.

3.3. Data collection method

In alignment with the research design, this study employed the semi-structured interview as its chosen method for data collection. "The semi-structured interview, as per Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), is a qualitative research technique that blends predefined interview questions with the adaptability to explore new subjects and pursue further inquiries based on participant responses. It entails having a core set of questions or themes to provide guidance during the interview while affording room for open-ended discussions and probing to gather extensive and intricate insights from participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, outlooks, and practices. Researchers could pose open-ended questions and delve deeper into participant responses, thereby accumulating comprehensive information (Patton, 2015)." The interview guide was peer-reviewed by experts historians in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Also a pilot test was conducted with four participants before full data collection. These strengthened the reliability of the instrument.

3.4. Analytical method

With the assistance of suitable computer software like Nvivo, the data from this study underwent thematic analysis where overarching concepts were grouped related categories together under these themes, forming a coherent framework that addressed the research questions. "In the final stages of analysis, we embarked on the interpretation of the identified themes. We examined what the data revealed about the phenomenon we were investigating and scrutinized it in the context of our research objectives. Relationships, contradictions, and variations within the data were explored to provide deeper insights into the subject matter. Ultimately, the findings of the analysis were presented in a clear and organized manner. The interpretations were supported with relevant quotes and examples from the data."



Given that historical events are often subjectively analyzed, the researchers recognize the potential for bias in selecting sources, framing interview questions, and interpreting responses. To mitigate this, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by ensuring a balanced presentation of perspectives, cross-checking findings with historical records, and incorporating multiple viewpoints from diverse participants.

3.5. Limitation of the study

Despite its contribution to existing literature, this study is never without limitations. For instance, this study lies in its small sample size of twelve participants, which included only 3 historians, 4 fishermen, 3 administrators and 2 lecturers. This limited representation reduces the generalizability of the findings to the wider population. The study also relied solely on interviews, which while valuable for capturing personal experiences and perspectives did not provide opportunities for methodological triangulation. The absence of complementary methods such as observations at historical sites or document analysis of school curricula restricts the depth of contextual understanding. Acknowledging these limitations is essential, as they highlight the need for future studies to adopt mixed methods and larger, more diverse samples to strengthen the reliability and applicability of the findings.

3.6. Ethical considerations

In the context of this study, key measures included obtaining informed consent by providing detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits, ensuring voluntary participation without coercion. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participants' information and securely storing data. Participants were free to withdraw at any time without penalty, and steps were taken to minimize potential harm through risk assessments.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The perceptions and collective memories of individuals regarding Ghana's colonial past

The first objective of this study sought to explore the perceptions and collective memories of individuals regarding Ghana's colonial past. By grouping the responses thematically, the slave trade and its impacts, loss of freedom and exploitation and historical injustice and hindrance to development emerged as the most occurring themes.

4.1.1. The slave trade and its impacts

To explore the perceptions and collective memories of individuals regarding Ghana's colonial past, the participants were asked, "What comes to mind when you think about Ghana's colonial past?" "With this, several participants vividly recall the transatlantic slave trade as a key aspect of Ghana's colonial past. Interviewees shared stories of how Ghanaians were taken from their communities, such as Kumasi and the Northern Region, and transported to Cape Coast and beyond. This theme highlights the inhumanity of slavery, with detailed accounts of how people were forcibly moved and sold at places like the Salaga slave market. As per the participants, the

memories extend to the harsh treatment during the journey and on the ships. This finding is evidenced as highlighted below."

"They told us that the Whites once came here and took our people away... they used to go as far as Kumasi and other far places to take many people and walk them down all the way to Cape Coast. Then they will put in ships and take them away" (Participant 1)

"...Some even die when they are taking them away, and they throw those people into the sea" (Participant 6)

These recollections reflect the deep emotional scars left by slavery, which many associate with the castles and forts along Ghana's coast, now visited by Black Americans seeking ancestral connections.

4.1.2. Loss of freedom and exploitation

The participants perceived Ghana's colonialism as a period of extreme loss of freedom. Here, the participants explained that the colonial leaders restricted the lives of the people and imposing laws and taxes on them which limited their freedom. According to the participants, this exploitation extended to Ghana's resources and people. Here, the participant explained that, the natural resources such as timber, gold, food crops of the people of Ghana then Gold Coast were exploited and lobbed to their countries. This is evidenced as the participant highlighted;

"People could not do what they wanted because we did not have our independence; the Whites were ruling over us and taking taxes" (Participant 1)

"They wanted to trade with us... they brought their goods such as gunpowder in exchange for our gold and salt, and later started trading our people" (Participant 3)

The accounts above suggest that colonialism disrupted the traditional ways of life, subjugated the local population, and stripped them of autonomy. Also, the narratives above highlight the economic and social disservice caused by colonial powers, which often dictated terms to the detriment of the local population.

4.1.3. Historical injustice and hindrance to development

From the participant's perspective, colonialism is viewed as a significant injustice that set Ghana back in terms of development. "The forced labor, exploitation, and the loss of able-bodied men created a gap that hindered the natural progression of the country. The respondent emphasized that although colonialism introduced some improved methods of doing things, it did not justify the extensive harm caused. The participant felt that the narrative of colonial discovery undermines the achievements and capabilities of African ancestors who lived and thrived long before colonization. This perspective highlights a sense of resentment toward the colonial legacy and a firm belief in the self-sufficiency of African societies before colonial intervention." This is evidenced as the participant highlighted; "I feel that we would have been way high on the development ladder if there hadn't been any form of colonialism. At the initial stage, many of the local people were just interested in their businesses and later some started to serve under them which turned the other way round and the colonial masters began to maltreat our people because of that they were no more



interested in their deals" (Participant 7).

"The gap was even created by taking away our able men and then after that they went in to totally colonizing us, literally dictating to us what we should do" (Participant 10).

The first account suggests that the participant perceives colonialism as a setback that disrupted Ghana's potential growth and progress. Additionally, the quotes indicate that the participant sees colonialism as an act that weakened the country both socially and economically by removing skilled individuals and imposing external control.

4.2. Ways colonial memory preserved and transmitted in Ghana

The second objective of this study sought to identify the preservation and transmission of Ghana's colonial memory. By examining the insights provided by participants, several themes emerge that shed light on how colonial memories are maintained and shared across generations, thus oral traditions and storytelling, historical sites as educational tools, and written historical accounts.

4.2.1. Oral traditions and storytelling

To identify the preservation and transmission of Ghana's colonial memory, the participants were asked, "how did you learn about the Ghana's colonial history?" in relation to this the participants assert that a major way colonial memory is preserved in Ghana is through oral traditions. "Participants indicated that elders, such as grandparents and parents, serve as primary sources of historical narratives. For example, one interviewee learned about colonial practices, such as traditional carpentry methods, from their grandparents. Through these oral stories, participants gain a detailed understanding of how colonial and post-colonial transformations impacted everyday life, such as the transition from manual labor to mechanized processes in carpentry." This finding is evidenced as highlighted below.

"I heard them from my grandparents. In the olden days, even when they wanted to cut wood for carpentry works, there was no chainsaw machine. There was a long saw they used, and it would take about a week or two to cut the tree and get ten pieces of wood" (Participant 6)

This quote highlights the role of grandparents as custodians of history, passing down detailed accounts of life during the colonial era, including how manual labor shaped everyday activities.

4.2.2. Historical sites as educational tools

According to the participants colonial memory is transmitted through visits to historical sites such as castles. "The stories shared by tour guides at these sites provide a vivid recounting of the slave trade and its atrocities. Participants reflected on the suffering endured by Africans during the transatlantic slave trade, including forced labor on sugar cane and coffee plantations, and the creation of the African diaspora, such as Black Americans. This implies that, these historical sites play an important role in ensuring the memories of colonial oppression remain a part of Ghana's collective consciousness. For some, the stories evoke powerful emotions, as illustrated by

a participant recounting a Black American visitor's anger upon seeing a White individual at a castle. These shared memories reinforce a sense of justice and historical awareness." This is evidenced as the participant highlighted;

"When we come to the castle, we hear the stories that are told by the tour guides. The Blacks were taken from all countries in Africa and were sent to South Africa and other countries to work in sugar cane and coffee farms. They were beaten and went through a lot of suffering" (Participant 7 and 8)

This quote illustrates the power of historical sites like castles in educating visitors about the brutal realities of colonial exploitation and the transatlantic slave trade.

4.2.3. Written historical accounts

The participants revealed that books and written records serve as another method for preserving colonial memory in Ghana. "Here, participants referenced learning history from individuals who were closely connected to Ghana's liberation struggle. For instance, a participant provided an account of Mr. Brew, who used to be a friend of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who contributed to his knowledge through books provided to read. As explained by the participant, these books not only function as educational tools but also offer insight into key figures and events that shaped Ghana's path to independence. This indicates how explicitly documented accounts complement oral traditions and provide a detailed and researched perspective on Ghana's colonial past or history." This is seen as a participant highlighted;

"From a great man called Mr. Brew... I learnt this history...Mr. Brew was Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's friend. He gave me the books to read and when I had any difficulties, I asked him and through our conversation he told me about visiting Kwame Nkrumah in prison at Asher Fort" (Participant 12).

The account above depict how books and mentorship from individuals with direct ties to historical events provide an in-depth and personal understanding of Ghana's colonial and post-colonial history.

4.3. The contemporary impact of colonial rule in Ghana

With regards to the third objective of this study, it sought to examine the contemporary impact of colonial rule in Ghana. From the data, several themes were identified that highlight both the positive and negative legacies of colonial rule in the country.

4.3.1. Positive Impacts

i. *Development of education:* To assess the participants' perception on the contemporary impact of colonial rule in Ghana, they were asked *"How do you see the impact of the colonial past on Ghana today?"* With regard to this, the participants provided that colonial rule introduced formal education to Ghana, which has had long-lasting benefits. The participants explained that schools like Philip Quacoe Boys School, established in Cape Coast, were among the first in the region. The participant emphasize that education opened pathways for Ghanaians to gain knowledge and skills necessary for societal advancement. This finding is evidenced as highlighted below:

"The first school was established in Cape Coast about 250 years



ago. That was Philip Quacoe Boys School, which started at the Castle. We got school through colonialism.” (Participant 2)

This emphasizes how colonial education systems laid the foundation for modern schooling in Ghana, even though they primarily served the colonial agenda at the time.

ii. Advancements in healthcare: According to the participants, colonial rule also introduced modern healthcare systems, significantly reducing mortality rates. Hospitals were built, and medical practices replaced traditional healing methods, often seen as inadequate by participants. The participants explained that this healthcare impact has been instrumental in improving the health of Ghanaians today. This finding is evidenced as highlighted below.

“The first hospital was established by Dr. John Sharp at King Aggrey School. In those days, fetish priests were the ones taking care of the sick people. Dr. John Sharp treated anyone who went to him there” (Participant 4 and 6).

This reflects how colonial interventions in healthcare revolutionized disease management and improved the overall health of Ghanaians.

iii. Introduction of technology: Participants noted that technological advancements, such as the telephone and mechanized tools, were introduced during colonial times. These innovations have continued to impact Ghana positively. Also, participants indicated that before the introduction of colonial technologies, fishing activities relied heavily on traditional tools, which were inefficient. With the arrival of colonial rulers, modern fishing techniques and tools, such as fishing nets and boats with motors, were introduced. These innovations enabled fishermen to catch larger quantities of fish, increasing productivity. This finding is evidenced as highlighted below.

“In those days, we did not have phones. But by God’s grace, the Whites who took our people away are the same people who have made phones for us, and we all have some now” (Participant 3)

“In those days, people used simple nets to fish, and they did not go far. But when the Whites came, they introduced fishing boats and bigger nets, and now fishermen can go far into the sea and get more fish. This has made fishing easier and more profitable for some families” (Participant 10)

This shows how technology, though initially foreign, became integrated into Ghanaian society. And it also demonstrates how the introduction of colonial technology reshaped fishing practices, making them more effective and scalable.

4.3.2. Negative Impacts

i. Economic exploitation: Colonial rule is criticized for its exploitative practices, particularly in the extraction of natural resources. Participants observed that infrastructure such as railways, was constructed primarily to serve colonial interests, not local development. The participants explained that this has been instrumental in perpetuating poverty and economic hardship in Ghana today. This demonstrates how colonial projects were designed to facilitate the movement of resources for export, leaving the local population with little to no benefit. One participant stated:

“They constructed the first railway line from Sekondi to Tarkwa. Why? To steal our gold. Why did they not construct

it to Cape Coast, but Tarkwa? It was because the gold was at Tarkwa” (Participant 7).

This construct above highlights how colonial powers prioritized resource extraction over the welfare of the local population.

ii. Psychological and cultural enslavement: As provided by the participants, another significant theme is the psychological impact of colonialism, which continues to shape the mindset of Ghanaians. Participants emphasized how colonial rule instilled a sense of inferiority in local cultures, creating a preference for foreign goods and ideas. As such the participants note that this legacy of colonial indoctrination has led to the collapse of local industries. This finding is evidenced as highlighted below.

“Even in a classical Ghanaian village, anything the Whiteman says is the truth. Some of our people will prefer to buy used clothing from a Whiteman than a cloth made by their grandmother” (Participant 1)

This underscores the lingering effects of colonial indoctrination, which undermines confidence in local traditions and products.

iii. Brain drain and dependency: Participants expressed concerns about how colonial legacies fostered a dependency mindset, particularly in the pursuit of opportunities abroad. This has resulted in a modern form of “*mental slavery*,” where many Ghanaians believe success can only be achieved outside the country. This cultural shift undermines national development as many skilled individuals emigrate, contributing to a brain drain. A participant shared:

“Everybody thinks that you can only find greener pastures when you travel outside the country. The youthful are the leaders of the country, but they are in a hurry to leave. How is the country going to be like?” (Participant 8)

This insight reflects how colonial influences have contributed to brain drain and the erosion of local talent.

iv. Social and political inequities: This study data revealed that colonial rule disrupted traditional governance structures and introduced systems that continue to marginalize local leadership and perpetuate inequality. Participants pointed out that colonial rulers often divided communities to maintain control, leaving a legacy of disunity and mistrust. According to this study’s data, another consequence of colonialism is the continued unequal trade relationships between Ghana and developed nations. This sentiment reflects how global economic systems, shaped during colonial times, continue to disadvantage Ghana. Some participants remarked:

“The British were coming and going... they stayed here for about 500 to 600 years, and they have done a lot of things here. The people in Cape Coast were divided among themselves because some of them stopped going to the fetish priests. “They keep us in the dark and always want to stay in front” (Participant 3 and 11).

This division illustrates the long-term social fragmentation caused by colonial rule and how the legacy of colonial rule remains deeply embedded in the country’s systems.

4.4. Discussion

4.1. The perceptions and collective memories of individuals regarding Ghana’s colonial past

In exploring the perceptions and collective memories of individuals regarding Ghana’s colonial past, this study found



that participants' reflections were dominated by themes of the slave trade and its impacts, loss of freedom and exploitation, and historical injustice and hindrance to development. "These findings indicate that Ghana's colonial history remains an established aspect of their shared memory, depicting both sorrow and critical reflection among the people. This is due to the fact that, the past experience of colonial rule, particularly the transatlantic slave trade, persist to align within their social consciousness, shaping contemporary identities and attitudes (Owusu-Ansah, 2023). These findings are consistent with the Collective Memory Theory, which assert that memories are shaped and preserved by social groups or communities through shared experiences (Gandhi, 2018). For example, this memory is likely maintained in Ghana through their oral traditions, preserved historical sites like Cape Coast Castle, and public commemorations. Also these findings resonate with prior studies, for instance a study by Mouafo *et al.* (2024), reports that majority of Ghanaians view the slave trade as a period of complete suffering that violated their human dignity. These shared memories of their past act as a reminder of the exploitation experienced and the resilience of the ancestors who endured these trials. Similarly, existing study asserts that while colonial governance brought modernization, its primary purpose was to serve colonial interests rather than those of the local people (Owusu-Ansah, 2023)."

Again, this study found that Ghanaians in Cape Coast perceived colonialism as a time of extreme loss of freedom. "Here, the participants explain how Ghana's natural resources, such as gold and timber, were taken and used to benefit colonial powers and how colonial leaders restricted Ghanaians lives via oppressive laws and taxes. This indicates how Ghanaians' memories reflect their understanding of colonial rule as a system of domination and resource depletion, rather than a collectively beneficial relationship. In supporting this, the Post-Colonial Theory, critiques colonialism as an exploitative system structured to assist and economically demerit societies who are victims of colonialism. This aligns with Addo (2011) who asserts that colonial policies disadvantaged local communities, which developed to socio-economic inequalities that exist to this day. These findings suggest that by emphasizing both its negative and positive impacts to Ghana's development, educational authorities should include a balanced narrative of colonial history into curricula. Also, stakeholders such as the Ministry of Tourism and Culture could preserve and promote historical sites like Cape Coast Castle as tools for teaching the public about the realities of colonialism."

4.2. Ways colonial memories are preserved and transmitted in Ghana

With regards to the second objective, this study found that storytelling and oral traditions, historical sites and written historical accounts are ways colonial memories are preserved and shared in Ghana. These findings indicate that by ensuring that the legacy of colonial rule remains a part of Ghana's collective consciousness, colonial memory is deeply rooted in both touchable and untouchable cultural practices. This is due to the fact that these methods collectively facilitate the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, fostering a significant

understanding of the colonial period.

From the findings, the stress on oral traditions indicates that oral traditions function as a living archive, encompassing historical memories within the fabric of family and community life. "That is such narratives are personalized and relatable, making them a significant instrumental for sharing history (Mensah, 2022). As Ofosu-Asare (2024) noted, oral traditions not only preserve memories of colonial encounters but also reinforce a sense of cultural resilience and continuity. Again, the recognition of historical sites as educational tools means that such sites act as educational tools and symbols of collective remembrance, ensuring that the brutal realities of colonial exploitation are not forgotten (Mensah, 2022). This is because these physical landmarks offer immersive experiences, making history accessible and impactful for visitors. Empirically, this finding supports Apoh's (2013) assertion that historical sites in Ghana are crucial for preserving and transmitting colonial memory through educational tours and ceremonies. Furthermore, the emphasizes of written historical accounts implies that written accounts complement oral traditions by offering detailed and researched perspectives on the colonial past. This is because books provide a more structured and enduring medium for historical preservation, allowing for critical reflection and analysis (Mensah, 2022)."

Within the framework of the Collective Memory Theory, these findings reveal how social structures like families, communities, and institutions shape and sustain shared historical narratives (Childs & Williams, 2014). "In practice, these findings suggest that policymakers, educators, and cultural heritage institutions should prioritize the documentation and promotion of oral histories, the preservation of historical sites, and the integration of colonial history into educational curricula. Specifically, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture should enhance funding for the maintenance of historical sites, while the Ministry of Education should incorporate more comprehensive accounts of colonial history into schools."

4.3. The contemporary impact of colonial rule in Ghana

In exploring the contemporary impact of colonial rule in Ghana, this study found that colonialism left a mixed legacy with both positive and negative outcomes. "On the positive side, this study found that colonial rule introduced formal education systems, exemplified by schools like Philip Quacoe Boys School in Cape Coast. This implies that colonial education provided skills and knowledge crucial for societal advancement. This is because these schools created an educated workforce, albeit primarily for the benefit of colonial administration. Within the framework of Post-Colonial Theory, this reflects the hybridization of knowledge systems, where colonial education reshaped indigenous knowledge (Childs & Williams, 2014). Empirically, Aidoo (2019) highlights how formal education expanded literacy and contributed to economic growth in Ghana. Again, colonial interventions introduced modern medical practices, reducing mortality rates and improving public health. This implies that the foundation of Ghana's healthcare system owes much to colonial advancements. This is because colonial healthcare infrastructure and practices replaced traditional methods, which participants viewed as less



effective. Empirically, this finding echoes Abdelfadeel (2021), who noted significant health improvements introduced during colonial rule. Furthermore, this study found that technologies such as telephones, mechanized tools, and modern fishing techniques transformed Ghanaian livelihoods. This implies that colonial technological innovations enhanced productivity and efficiency in various sectors. This is because tools like motorized fishing boats improved practices, enabling economic gains for families. Post-Colonial Theory identifies this as a form of dependency, where foreign innovations overshadowed local ingenuity (Gandhi, 2018). Empirically, this supports Abdelfadeel (2021), who noted how colonial infrastructure facilitated modern economic activities.”

On the other hand, this study revealed that colonial infrastructure, such as railways, prioritized resource extraction, particularly of gold. “This implies that Ghana’s economy became heavily reliant on exporting raw materials, limiting industrialization. This is because colonial projects were designed for imperial benefit, not local development. Post-Colonial Theory critiques such systems as perpetuating structural dependencies. Empirically, Anyidoho and Kpessa-Whyte (2023) discuss how exploitative practices left Ghana economically disadvantaged. Additionally, this study found that colonialism instilled a preference for foreign goods and ideas, undermining confidence in local traditions. This implies that colonial indoctrination contributed to the collapse of indigenous industries and cultural dislocation. This is due to the fact that the forced inferiority of local cultures created persisting psychological blockade. This resonates with the Post-Colonial Theory which reflects how colonial narratives demerit native identities (Gandhi, 2018). This is consistent with Aidoo (2019) who reports the cultural fragmentation resulting from colonial ideologies.”

The perception on psychological enslavement also reveals its tension with contemporary Pan-African identity. While Pan-Africanism promotes unity, pride, and the reclamation of African heritage, its expression in Ghana is often mediated through modern capitalist and globalized contexts. For example, initiatives like “The Year of Return” (2019) celebrated African diaspora connections and decolonial pride, yet were also tied to tourism, branding, and Western-oriented consumption (Adom, 2019). This demonstrates how Pan-African identity can coexist with, and even reinforce, global consumerist frameworks showing that mental decolonization remains incomplete.

This study, again found that Ghanaians in Cape Coast expressed concerns about a colonial legacy fostering emigration and dependency and that colonial disruptions to governance structures created lasting social fragmentation and inequities. This indicates that colonialism shaped perceptions of success as attainable only outside Ghana and that colonialism’s legacy of centralized power and ethnic divisions fuels modern governance challenges in Ghana. This is due to the fact that colonial governance limited opportunities for local advancement, which leads to the erosion of national talent and that the colonial strategy of divide-and-rule planted inequalities, marginalizing traditional systems. In support of the finding the Post-Colonial Theory critiques such dependency as a remnant of imperial dominance and reveals how such power imbalances remains

in post-independence nations (Childs & Williams, 2014). The current findings echo with scholars like Anyidoho and Kpessa-Whyte (2023), who highlighted colonialism’s role in creating economic instability and Obeng-Odoom (2016), who discussed the structural barriers stemming from colonial governance. These findings provide that stakeholders such as the Ghana Education Service (GES) should invest in integrating and cooperating indigenous knowledge into curricula to preserve cultural heritage. Similarly, the Ministry of Trade and Industry should prioritize local industrialization to reduce dependence on raw material exports.”

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Ghana’s colonial legacy remains deeply embedded in its social, economic, and cultural structures. Guided by Collective Memory Theory and Postcolonial Theory, the findings show that Ghanaians collectively preserve colonial memories through oral traditions, historical sites, and education memories that shape both national pride and lingering resentment. Drawing on Bhabha’s (1994) concept of hybridity, the study reveals how Ghanaians both reject and depend on colonial systems such as education and governance, reflecting a mixed identity. The analysis of psychological enslavement shows that colonial ideologies created internalized inferiority, which continues to influence modern consumer habits and ideas of success. Although Pan-African initiatives like The Year of Return (Adom, 2019) promote unity and heritage, they also reflect Westernized forms of consumption. These insights suggest that while political independence has been achieved, mental and cultural decolonization remain incomplete. True liberation requires reawakening collective memory, promoting indigenous knowledge, and reforming education to rebuild confidence in African identity.”

IMPLICATIONS

This study made a theoretical implication by validating Halbwachs’s theory of memory. It demonstrates that colonial memory functions beyond personal recollection through social processes connected with families, school education, historical sites, and communal traditions. Ghana creates national consciousness and identity through legendary exchanges with symbolic representations and communal heritage. The study confirms the predictions from postcolonial theory about the lasting economic, cultural, and psychological implications that colonial systems imposed upon their former possessions. The study enhances postcolonial society’s historical consciousness and understanding through its synthesis of narrative analysis and historical and sociological theory.

On the practical implication side, the findings of the study indicate that the slave trade, exploitation, and loss of freedom are among the objectives that have had a direct impact on determining how individuals perceive and remember Ghana’s colonial past. The following reflections can be resolved by introducing a balanced and nuanced narrative of colonial history into the educational curricula. If this could be acknowledged, one can accept both the adverse effects and those that contribute to the nation’s development. Through the curriculum revision by the Ministry of Education, such an approach can be



implemented where both hardships experienced by colonialism and its role in shaping modern Ghana will be brought to the student's attention. Thus, students can acquire a more accurate view of their history, which can lead to the formation of a more resistant national identity.

Additionally, historical sites of the Cape Coast Castle type – powerful symbols of Ghana's colonial history – should be better preserved and used as learning aids. The Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture can help achieve the above by increasing the funding allotted to maintain these sites and promoting educational tours. This historical memory would also be preserved by creating links between these sites, school excursions, and local educational programs. By incorporating these sites, students would better understand the realities of colonialism and its enduring consequences.

Ghana's colonial infrastructure was predominantly laid down to support resource extraction, hinder industrialization, and ultimately encourage economic dependence on raw materials. To resolve this, the Ministry of Trade and Industry should start implementing a policy that would promote value addition in the processing of industries like gold and timber. The Ghana government is in a position to encourage local manufacturing through tax incentives to its local manufacturers and through infrastructural investments in the industrial training centers to enhance domestic production, which will reduce its reliance on raw material exports and strengthen local economies within this process.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Participant demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency (n=12)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	7	58.3
	Female	5	41.7
Age Range (Years)	25–34	2	16.7
	35–44	5	41.7
	45–54	3	25
	55 and above	2	16.7
	Secondary	3	25
Educational Level	Tertiary	7	58.3
	Postgraduate	2	16.7
	Historian	3	25
Occupation	Fisherman	4	33.3
	Administrator	3	25
	Lecturer	2	16.7
	1–10 years	2	16.7
Years of Residence in Cape Coast	11–20 years	5	41.7
	Above 20 years	5	41.7
	Married	8	66.7
Marital Status	Single	4	33.3

