

# **“In Sulemitenga things are there”**

**A study on images of the West in Northeast Ghana**

MA Thesis

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11<sup>th</sup> December 2003

Cultural Anthropology/ Non-Western Sociology

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University of Amsterdam

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Picture front cover: poem about money, written on hut by Linda Aniah Adongo, November 2002, Kunkua, Ghana

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## **Acknowledgements**

First of all I wish to thank all people in Ghana who enabled me to do the research on which this thesis is based. In Tamale, I am indebted to Professor Saa Dittoh and Emilia Guo, who helped me to define my research area and pointed me in the right direction. In Bolgatanga, I thank Dr. David and Lydia Millar, who received me in their house and introduced me to the community of Kunkua and the Aniah family in particular. Thanks also to Dr. Millar for discussing my first findings with me and providing me with useful advice.

I am highly indebted to all the people in the Upper East Region I interviewed. By giving me some of their time and confiding in me, they made it possible for me to write this thesis. Many thanks to the Aniah family for their hospitality and warmth and for making me feel at home. I thank the children for their assistance in all the situations I felt helpless, their willingness to explain me everything I asked and for making me smile so often. I thank Assibi for taking care of me, for cooking my favourite food when I was ill and for her efforts to communicate with me even though I failed to speak her language. And of course I am very grateful to Richard Aniah Adongo for opening many doors, for assisting and interpreting in interviews and for telling me so much about the community. Especially Richard's understanding of my aims and perspectives was of great value to me. Furthermore, I want to thank John Akadumah in Bolga for his enthusiastic assistance and interpretation, Alice in Gowrie for the "dinner parties" talks and hospitality. Finally, I here want to thank my supervisors at the University of Amsterdam, Kristoffel Lieten and Valentina Mazzucato, for their coaching and guidance during my research and the process of writing this thesis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction to Thesis</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Theory and Research Question</b>	<b>8</b>
§ 1.1: Theoretical Framework	8
<i>Orientalism and Occidentalism</i>	
<i>Dialectical definition</i>	
<i>Political contingencies</i>	
<i>Imagination as a historical process</i>	
<i>Imagination of here and elsewhere in a globalising world</i>	
<i>Images: individual or collective?</i>	
<i>Concluding remarks: starting points for my thesis</i>	
§ 1.2: Research Question: Shifting Focus of Research	17
<b>Chapter 2: Ethnographic Context: Ethnic, Historical and Geographical Background</b>	<b>19</b>
§ 2.1 Frafra, Grushi or Boonsi?	19
§ 2.2 History of the Region	22
<i>The pre-colonial period</i>	
<i>British influence, missionaries and migration</i>	
<i>Perspectives on Frafra land in the 1930s and 1960s</i>	
<i>Contact with whites and Christianity</i>	
<i>Formal Western education</i>	
<i>Concluding remarks</i>	
§ 2.3 The Research Area Today	33
<i>The Upper East Region</i>	
<i>Bolgatanga</i>	
<i>Gowrie</i>	
<i>Kunkua</i>	
<i>Bongo</i>	
<i>Economic activities</i>	
<i>Development organisations in the area</i>	
<i>Household/family level</i>	
<i>Religion</i>	
<b>Chapter 3: The Fieldwork</b>	<b>42</b>
<i>Experiencing fieldwork; my stay in Kunkua</i>	
<i>Setting up the research: initial decisions</i>	
<i>The research population</i>	
<i>How to catch an image: methods and techniques used</i>	
<i>The Interviews</i>	
<i>Translation</i>	
<i>A white woman in the field. Reflections on the role of my own identity..</i>	

*Appendix 1: Life history Richard Aniah Adongo*

<b>Chapter 4: Images of the West: Common Images and Individual fantasies</b>	<b>62</b>
§ 4.1 The meaning of the West/Sulemitenga	62
§ 4.2 The content of the images	64
<i>Visualisations of Sulemitenga</i>	
<i>Associations with Sulemitenga</i>	
<i>Ideas about family life in Sulemitenga</i>	
<i>Ideas about poverty in Sulemitenga.</i>	
<i>Imagining going there; Sulemitenga as a migration destination</i>	
§ 4.3 Is it all positive?	78
§ 4.4 Everyone his own green pasture: individual images of Sulemitenga	81
§ 4.5 Conclusion	84
<b>Chapter 5: Historical Origins of the Images</b>	<b>86</b>
§ 5.1 The pre-independent period: the influence on today's images of slave trade and colonisation	87
<i>"In the past you couldn't move"</i>	
<i>Whites in the area. "In the past we would have feared you"</i>	
<i>A conflation of the past</i>	
§ 5.2 The influence of the colonial discourse	93
§ 5.3 Conclusion	96
<b>Chapter 6: The Present Context: Contemporary Influences</b>	<b>98</b>
<i>Flows of people: "With so many whites around, money will come"</i>	
<i>Reverse flows: migration to the West</i>	
<i>Flows of goods: "In Sulemitenga things are there"</i>	
<i>Flows of images: the influence of television</i>	
<i>Education as a contemporary influence</i>	
<i>The influence of Christianity</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusions</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>References cited</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>133</b>

## **Introduction to thesis**

In 1922, Bronislaw Malinowski wrote in his now classic anthropological work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, that the goal of ethnography should be “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world.” Eighty years later, this idea can still be applied to this thesis, based on ethnographic research. This study about people in Northeast Ghana, however, has an extra dimension. It is my aim to capture and understand not only the informant’s vision of *his own* world or society, but also his ideas about a place far away and different from his own, namely “the West”.

Anthropology has always been interested in how societies look at other societies, because it is part of the process of constructing their own collective identity. We know who and what we are if we know who and what we are not. In typical anthropological idiom: we represent “the Other” to define “the Self”.

The people I studied have the choice to compare themselves with many different societies or groups: people in the neighbouring village, people from a different ethnic or religious group or people in neighbouring countries. With the intensified contact with places far away, because of facilitated travel, telecommunication and mass-media, the West and its inhabitants has increasingly turned into a meaningful Other for them, as for many people living in the Non-Western world.

The fact that increasing numbers of Africans try to migrate to the West (Zlotnik 1998; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1996) makes an understanding of the images of the West in an African country particularly relevant. It is often suggested, both in media and in studies on migration (Dam 1998; de Thouars 1999) that particular (distorted) images and false expectations are part of the decision to migrate to the West. Not much attention has been paid to the exact content of these images or to the way in which they come into being. Which messages about the West reach people in the non-Western World and how are they translated into ideas about that place far away? And are the images simply the sum of different information flows that reach the people or are there other factors at work in their construction?

The fieldwork I carried out in Ghana during the last three months of 2002 forms the basis of this thesis. Both the topic and location of my research can be seen as the outcome of a

process of thoughts, decisions and, most of all, more or less accidental encounters. In the flowing paragraphs I will explain what led me to temporarily live on the savannah in the most Northeastern corner of Ghana, studying the images people had of “my world, the West”?

After five years of studying anthropology, I realised that my main interest in the field was concerned with the concepts of development and modernisation. Especially the meaning of these notions for people living in Third World countries fascinated me. A personal inclination towards romanticising life in a less developed world, “close to nature”, must have fed these interests. But my initial attempts to translate these ideas into a concrete research plan failed, my point of departure turned out to be too abstract.

I shifted my attention to a hot issue in the media: economic migration from South to North, from the poor to the rich world, from the under-developed to the developed countries. Though the main concern in media and politics is confined to keeping or getting these migrants out, to me this phenomenon seemed to have more interesting aspects. I assumed that powerful motives, images and expectations must lie behind the willingness to leave family and friends behind and to embark on an often hazardous adventure. Depicting these images and expectations in the context in which they were being formed, the home base of (potential) migrants was a next plan in the process.

Second thoughts as well as methodological and practical reasons made my focus move more and more towards the *desire* to migrate and the *images* that exist of the West in general, rather than the motives of actual migrants. I realised that a study of actual migrants should be based on fieldwork in Holland or another Western country while I intended to study the ideas in the place of origin. Furthermore, such a study would suffer from a basic weakness; the original migrants’ images would be distorted by reality, by the time of arrival in the West. And the more I got into it, the more *imagination* of places different than one’s own, looked like a key aspect of anthropology to me. Especially since today “Images of the other” span the globe, in a time that is characterised by a growing interconnectedness of different places, but by an increasing inequality and the closing of borders as well.

Ghana was a good option. The political situation in Ghana has been reasonably stable for the last decade, which means that I could assume that fear of prosecution by the government or other groups would not play a significant role in the lives of the informants and their potential desire to migrate. Secondly, Ghana’s official language is English, which meant that I could at least communicate with a part of the population. In addition, I had come into contact with Dr. Valentina Mazzucato, who is the head of a larger research project on trans-nationalist networks between Ghana and the Netherlands at the University of

Amsterdam and the Free University. The possibility to discuss and compare my future findings with researchers who study related issues in Ghana appeared useful to me.

The choice for Ghana, I should add, was initially influenced by the fact that a lot of economic migration has taken place and takes place from Ghana to the West. It has been estimated that between ten and twenty percent of all Ghanaian citizens is currently living abroad (Peil 1995). A vast majority of this migration is from the Southern and Ashanti regions (Anarfi et al. 1997: 7). However, as my plans shifted towards the *images* people have of the West, away from migration as such, these statistics made me decide to go to one of the Northern regions, where migration to the West is far less common and which are considered the poorest areas of the country. I expected the links with the Western world to be less established than in the South and assumed that that would make the study of images and the *desire* to migrate more genuine. Picturing the West with less information through migrants and media, would ask more from the imagination. Also the fact the background of migration from Southern Ghana has extensively been studied by others (a.o. Dam 1998; Lindner 1992; de Thouars 1999), contributed to this decision. Choosing an area where migration was less common would enable me more to get an insight in factors other than migration, that constitute the images.

Another choice to be made was between a rural or urban setting. I chose a rural setting because social relations would be more oversee-able in a village than in a city or town. This less complex setting made it simpler for me, an inexperienced ethnographer, to get an insight in the different information flows that would reach the community.

At this point the story of my fieldwork starts: going to a village in North Ghana to study what images people have of the West. This means taking a plane to Ghana's capital Accra and embarking on a ten-hour bus ride to Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region. It is not my first step on the African continent, some years before I have travelled around Kenya; still I am overwhelmed by the impressions. The burning sun, the bad conditions of the roads and cars and the openness of the people.

From the moment I set foot in Ghana, my research topic and its related phenomena appear to be present everywhere around me, in different manifestations. For the few euros I change at the Airport I get in return a bag full of cedis, which will keep me going for a few days. On the streets of Accra I talk to boys from the North who have come South to look for a job. In Tamale I watch ex-president Jerry Rawlings being driven through the crowds, standing



in a jeep wearing a USA baseball jacket. Taxi drivers tell me that they are saving money in order to go to Europe, illegally, and ask me if life is hard over there “for a black”.

In Tamale I have a contact person, Professor Saa Dittoh, dean at the University of Development Studies (U.D.S.), an acquaintance of one of my supervisors. By email he has offered to help me find a suitable village for my fieldwork. After he has read my research proposal, Saa Dittoh, as well as some of the students he introduces me to, suggest going to the Upper East Region, one of Ghana’s three northern regions. They point out that this region, Dittoh’s own homeland, is very densely populated and has known a lot of migration within Ghana for years. I assume that the high population density will enable me to reach many people. The occurrence of migration (at least inside Ghana) makes me suppose that the villages are not too isolated. The political situation in the Northern Region also influences the advice given. Since the murder of the Paramount Chief in Yendi in April 2002, there has been unrest in the Northern Region, causing a curfew in Tamale. Although I am not troubled by the unrest during my stay in Tamale, leaving this region to a more quiet area feels like a good idea.

I spend some afternoons at the U.D.S. campus at Nyankpala; some very basic buildings about eighteen kilometres away from Tamale, surrounded by dry plains. It is useful to talk to the students and I get the chance to do some exploratory research. I see the men’s dormitories plastered with posters of white models and I am introduced to the only student who has been to the West, where his family lives. He also turns out to be the only student with a room full of modern electronic equipment. I talk with the students about their backgrounds, their ideas about differences between Ghana and Europe, migration and their dreams to do a MA course abroad. Most of them grew up in a village. They like the idea of me going to live in “the bush” for a while and assure me that it will be very different and tough, but that the villagers will be very hospitable to me.

A tip from a U.D.S. teacher who gives me a lift back to Tamale one afternoon, leads me to the Savannah Resource Management Centre, more specifically to Dr. David Millar, a sociologist who is considered an expert on the Upper East. I briefly explain my research plans to him and tell him that I am looking for a place to stay (either in a bungalow or with a family) in not too small a village with a reasonably mixed age-composition. I leave out some other criteria I had set up for the ideal research location. After what I have seen and heard of the Northern countryside so far, criteria like the occurrence of international migration and access to several media or means of communication, appear unrealistic to me. Dr. Millar answers that he may know a good family to stay with, in a village fifteen kilometres away

from Bolgatanga, the capital of the Upper East. He is just on his way to visit the village, he will make inquiries for me.

A few days later I am waiting in Millar's white villa in Bolgatanga to be picked up by my future host. I find out that my host family will not be the chief's family as I expected, but an "ordinary family". The waiting lasts for a day due to some miscommunication and Mrs. Millar finally decides to drop me off personally. Red dirt roads lead us out of Bolgatanga and soon the driver turns the 4wd car off the road. We follow small winding paths made by feet and bicycles, until the driver stops the car. We get out at an open spot with a big tree surrounded by corn and millet fields. Later, this turns out to be Kunkua's central point. Someone is sent to inform the family that I have arrived and two women come and greet me. Mrs Millar instructs me how to answer their greetings and goes back into the car after a quick good bye. The women point out that I have to follow them and insist on carrying my heavy backpacks on their heads. We walk to the place that will be my home for a few months and the central point of my research: the Aniah family household.

## **Chapter 1: Theory and research question**

In what theoretical discussions is my research interesting? In what ways do anthropologists look at, and think about the construction of images of an “elsewhere” or “the Other”? Which other comparable studies have been carried out and what have been their conclusions? Firstly, I will search for answers to these questions. Then, taking these answers into consideration, I will determine how I will approach my data and which questions are to be answered in my study. I will make clear how my research question should be understood on a more theoretical level and how my study can contribute to current discussions on the topic.

### **§ 1.1 Theoretical Framework**

#### ***Orientalism and Occidentalism***

As a starting point for a look at the existing literature I take “Orientalism”, a text by the literary and cultural critic Edward Said (1978). The book has been influential to both the discipline of anthropology in general as, more specific, to the thinking about the ways humans produce knowledge and ideas about people or worlds different from their own. In “Orientalism” Said describes and criticises how Western scholars and artists have understood the Middle East, called the Orient. He argues that they have constructed a distorted image of the Orient, one that is euro-centric and essentialist and that highlights only differences with the West in order to distinguish oriental characteristics. Orientalism is for Said “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”) (Said 1978: 43).

As a result of Said’s book, the term “Orientalism” has gained a more generic meaning in anthropology. It now refers to the distortions in the perception and analysis of alien societies by anthropologists. Orientalism has become a term for a “particular, suspect type of anthropological thought” (Carrier 1995: 1). This notion as well as Said’s arguments, have become part of broader discussions about the question if an anthropologist is actually able to represent alien societies through ethnography and how the ethnographer’s bias, perspective and various political interests influence the production of knowledge (a.o. Clifford and Marcus 1986).

From Orientalism emerged another concept that is even more applicable to my study: the concept of Occidentalism. Orientalism, in both Said’s definition of the concept and its

more general meaning, mainly refers to images people *in* the West have of a world far away. Occidentalism, however, stands for images people have *of* the West, the Occident. James Carrier defines Occidentalisms (Carrier 1996) as follows: “An Occidentalism is a distorted and stereotyped image of Western society, which can be held by people inside and outside the West and which can be articulated or implicit.”

So on the one hand Occidentalism is concerned with the images Westerners themselves have of the West. It can then stand for a self-reflective concern within the discipline that questions what assumptions anthropologists make about their own world (Carrier 1995: 6). On the other hand, Occidentalism is a concept that deals with images people outside the West have of the Occident, the West. It is this latter sort of Occidentalism that is most relevant for my research.

### ***Dialectical Definition***

It appears justifiable to approach my study on the images people in an African country have of the West, as a study on Occidentalisms. Ideas derived from Said’s “Orientalism” about the production of knowledge about an elsewhere can be useful for my analysis too. The question to answer first, before I proceed, is what I can learn from writings on Occidentalism and Orientalism; how are Occidentalisms produced and why are the images distorted? Behind both notions, there is a structuralist assumption about how people define themselves and others. It says that this definition is a process whereby the own social unit and the alien are compared and certain features of each unit are identified as characterising the different areas. The selected features are thus always contrasting elements that are taken to express the essences or crucial distinguishing features of the two units. The resulting characterisations are dialectical because it is assumed that they emerge only as the negation of the other (Carrier 1996).

This assumption coincides with Said’s main point of critique on Orientalist images, which is that the scholars of the Orient exaggerated the differences between ‘the Other’ and themselves in order to distinguish the characteristics of the other. Yet, despite his critique, Said (1978: 55) argues that this process of dialectical essentialisation is a universal practice, part of human nature: “..there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance between what is close to it and what is far away”(1978: 55). To a certain extent, he argues, modern and primitive societies seem thus to derive a sense of their identities negatively. Carrier (1995: 2) also recognises that this contextual or dialectical form of definition (“To tell what a thing is, you

place it in terms of something else”) is not specific to anthropology. It is a manifestation of a more general process whereby groups of people define themselves in opposition to the alien, the other and whereby the other is defined in opposition to themselves.

The idea that identities are formed dialectically has an important implication for my study. It implies that images of the West by non-Western informants cannot be explained without looking at how these people imagine themselves and what they see as the core-features of their own lives and culture. And vice-versa: images of the West can be found in a concealed form in utterances about their own situation. Carrier (1995: 15) writes: “Frequently, perhaps even typically, people talk only about one part of the opposition, just as anthropologists typically describe the orient and remain silent about the occident. Commonly then, it is necessary to infer the hidden element of the pair.”

It has to be noted that the idea of essentialised, dialectical definition of self and others is an old theory. Gustav Jahoda, who studied images of “the white man” in Ghana (1961) years before Said’s publication, observed more than forty years ago: “African stereotypes of and attitudes towards Europeans are indissolubly linked with African self-images, as they have gradually evolved in the course of contact with the West”(Jahoda 1961: 90).

Although images of the Other are considered important in the construction of the own identity, both Carrier and Said stress that these images can be vague. Carrier (1995: 2-3): “We may think that we are simply describing something that exists out there in the real world. However, because such definitions are contextual, the thing described is, in fact, unstable. It varies with its context, and so loses its substance or facticity and becomes fluid”. Said had earlier stated it as follows: “Yet often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is “out there”, beyond ones own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside ones own” (1978: 54).

### ***Political contingencies***

Neither the distortion or *falseness* nor the particular content of Orientalist and Occidentalist images can be explained satisfactorily by only the human tendency to distinguish the familiar and the alien and to heighten the differences between them. Said (1978) and Carrier emphasise that the images are not created in a vacuum, that they do not “spring unbidden from the differences between groups” (Carrier 1995: 8). Representations are “embedded first in language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer” (Said 1978: 272).

Said describes a series of political and economic contingencies that has shaped the way the Orient was pictured by Western scholars, colonial officials and artists. He looks at factors that help to explain why it was useful for the Westerners to imagine the Orient as a timeless, alien essence. He looks at the different “networks of interests” that shaped the specific ways the Orient was perceived and at the specific socio-economic institutions that enabled it. The Western colonial domination over the Orient was of course central to this. Said therefore describes Orientalism not only as a discourse on the Orient but also as a sign of Euro-Atlantic dominance over the Orient (Said 1978: 6).

So according to Orientalist/Occidental thought, images of the Self and the Other or the here and the elsewhere are in the first place constructed by contrasting them to each other, but the context in which they are constructed and the situation of the constructor are influential too. Carrier (1995: 8) writes: “Political contingencies influence which of the many possible distinctions become important, become taken for granted ways of identifying the essence of us and them.”

What does Carrier exactly mean by “political contingencies”? How does this apply to my research on images of the West in Ghana? Contingencies are the specific circumstances, the context in which the images are formed. The political contingencies that Carrier refers to are *inequalities* within and between societies (Carrier 1995: 10). *Within* societies, people have different positions and interests and hence see fit different images of self and other. The circumstances they live in determine what elements of images make sense for them (Carrier 1995: 26).

The inequalities *between* societies, which Carrier speaks about, in my case refer to the connections between the West and the Upper East Region of Ghana. In more concrete terms: to the movement of people (travelling and migration in both directions), of media images, consumption goods and development aid. So summarising the above theory, it appears that it is not in the first place the reality in the place that is imagined (i.e. the West) which shapes the images. It is rather the situation in the place of construction (the Upper East Region) and the connections with the West that are most relevant in their construction.

### ***Imagination as a historical process***

So in order to understand the construction of images of the West, relations or connections with the West should be examined. I think it is important not to look only at today’s situation but to approach it historically. Images of the West and Westerners as well as self-images in

post-colonial societies like Ghana, have been formed over time and they reflect a history of dealing with the experience of being ruled over by the Occident (Nyamnjoh 2002: 609; Jahoda 1961: 90).

Nederveen Pieterse also sees the construction of images of others as a historical process. Yet, he hereby stresses that this means that the images reflect change: “changes in the imagination of others do not so much reflect changes in the characteristics of the labelled group, but rather the changes in the circumstances of the labelling group or changes in the relation between these two groups” (Nederveen Pieterse 1990).

In my effort to understand the process of knowledge production of “the Other” or “elsewhere”, I have been using the theory of scholars who were writing about an opposite situation: the imagination of the Orient (Said 1978) or the stereotyping by whites about blacks (Nederveen Pieterse 1990). Yet I am well aware that these processes are not symmetrical or identical opposites of the process I studied. Although dialectical and essentialist definitions of the familiar can occur whenever two sets of people come into contact, it has to be kept in mind that the relation between Africa and the West is historically unequal, looking at the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism (Nederveen Pieterse 1990: 9; Carrier 1995: 10).

Both Said (1978) and Nederveen Pieterse (1990) argue that certain “white interests” (economical, political, cultural, emotional or psychological) are reflected in the images of the Other which Westerners constructed through time. The Westerners were in a position that enabled them to construct images that were best for themselves. Yet the unequal relationship between Africa and the West prevents me from simply applying this idea on my study, by saying that the images of my informants reflect merely their own interests. Taking into account the Western hegemony (historically and contemporarily), it is possible that Western interests and power are reflected in the Occidental images too. Hopefully, my study will show if this is the case.

### ***Imagination of here and elsewhere in a globalising world***

When writing about the relationship between of different places in the world (or more specifically; between the West and Africa or the Occident and the Orient) the word *Globalisation* automatically springs to my mind. Globalisation as a feature of today’s world, which stands for a growing interconnectedness of different places on earth caused by twentieth-century innovations in technology (particularly in transportation and communication) that have made it easier and quicker for people and things to get around (Ferguson 2002: 1; Inda et al. 2002). Globalisation as a process that allows more and more

peoples and cultures to be cast into intense and immediate contact with each other. Despite its abstract and macro-level character, I think the concept of globalisation can be useful for my analysis because it conceptualises the present connections (in the form of flows of people, goods and images) between my research area and the West that for a large part, shape the images I studied.

Recently, attention has been pointed at the fact that globalisation is a rather uneven process (Inda et al. 2002: 4, 13), and that the flows are not moving equally in all directions. There is a growing awareness that many places or peoples in the world do have no or only marginal access to means of transport and communication that bring them in contact with places far away. The prices for an airplane ticket or phone call are too high for them or their area simply lacks the modern communication or transport means that characterise globalisation. Thereby, the tightening immigration laws in the Western World have severely restricted travelling to the West by non-Westerners. In this study I will look at the way globalisation has affected the ideas of my informants. In other words, how do the intensified possibilities for contact with the West (through travel, mass-media, telecommunication, flows of goods) influence their images of the West; has it indeed made informants feel more connected to it?

Imagining the West can be seen as the imagining of other possible lives and worlds. Arjun Appadurai discusses the imagination<sup>1</sup> in a global era in his book: *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996). In this book, Appadurai argues that the imagination in the post-electronic world plays a newly significant role. Yet he acknowledges that imagination, in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths and stories, has been present in every society, in some culturally organised way.

*Until recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of possible lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special moments or places, restricted to special moments or places* (1996: 53).

Appadurai argues that in the last two decades, the imagination has become more important. The imagination has become as social, collective fact<sup>2</sup>. He argues that more persons in more

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst Carrier (1995) and Said (1978) speak of *images* (of Self, Other, Orient or Occident), Appadurai (1991; 1996) and other recent writers (Weiss 2002; Monga 2000) use the term *imagination*. Unfortunately, none of them gives a proper definition of this term, but words such as “consciousness” and “subjectivities” seem to be taken as synonyms. I think *imagination* stand for a practice of which images can be a part or product, in the form of mental representations kept in the mind, or articulated in art or talk.

<sup>2</sup> I will discuss this problem later: is imagination a collective or individual practice?



parts in the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before (Appadurai 1996: 3, 53), because they are no longer dependent on their everyday mundane experiences for ideas what is and what can be (Hannerz 2003: 326).

Appadurai sees the emergence of mass media and mass-migration, working together as one force, as the main cause of this change. Firstly, it is the mass media (especially since the introduction of cinema, television and video) that he sees as influential because they “present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives” (1996: 53). Yet in his eyes, the importance of media is not so much as direct sources of new images and scenarios for life possibilities. According to Appadurai, their main importance is as “semiotic diacritics of great power, which also inflect social contact with the metropolitan world facilitated by other channels” (1996: 53). In other words: media do not only supply images and information about other places and possibilities, they also change the way people interpret information that reaches them through, for example, direct contact with strangers.

As a second source that makes people consider a wider set of possible lives, Appadurai mentions mass-migration. It is “the contact with, news of and rumours about others in one’s social neighbourhood who have become inhabitants of these far way worlds” (Appadurai 1995: 53). “More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born: this is the wellspring of the increased rates of migration at very level of social, national and global life” (Appadurai 1996: 6). Appadurai stresses that more people now than in the past deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move. Besides that, he stresses that both these realities and fantasies now function on a larger scale; villagers in an Indian village now think of moving to Dubai or Houston instead of to an Indian city (Appadurai 1996: 34).

Obviously, my data do not enable me to “check” if imagination has indeed become a more important practice in the last decades. Yet, I agree with Weiss’s critique on the contrast Appadurai creates between a taken for granted “givenness of existence” that is now being challenged by ever more exposure to alternative “possible lives” (Appadurai 1991: 198). Weiss warns for making such a division, since it runs the risk of becoming a historical determined division between become closed and open societies. (Weiss 2002: 97).

Besides that, when looking at the relevance of Appadurai’s main argument for my analysis, I realise that my informants in rural Ghana were not living in the post-electronical society that Appadurai takes as point of departure. Nevertheless, Appadurai’s analysis of the influence of media and migration on the imagination can be relevant for me, even though

these influences may be smaller than Appadurai assumes. During my data presentation and analysis it will become clear if (or in how far) these factors indeed function as important material for fantasies about other possible lives and in how far these possible lives are believed to be situated in the West.

***Images: individual or collective?***

There is one more problem I want to examine with regard to the theory on images and the imagination. It relates to the question if images should be considered as shared and collective or as individual constructions that can differ from person to person. Appadurai stresses that it is the *collective* imagination and not the individual imagination or fantasy he speaks of. He sees it mainly as the result of the mass media, which make it possible for a group that begins to “imagine and feel things together. Conditions of collective reading, criticism and pleasure make possible a “community of sentiment” (Appadurai 1996: 7).

But do members of a group really construct the same images together? And do particular shared circumstances make people construct the same images? The heterogeneous character of culture has been stressed a lot in recent literature (Dirks et al.1994). Social, religious and gender differences cause distinctions in society that can be larger than the cultural or ethnic similarities. Therefore, I think we should be careful to look at imagination purely as a group-thing, whereby all members of a community such as a village imagine “other possible lives” in the same way. Individual, socio-economical, or other specificities may determine the way in which the information about the West is perceived. Hence, the constructed images can be different and even contradictory from person to person.

Other ethnographic research that has been done on images of the West (Carrier 1995; Lindner1992; Nyamnjoh 2002; Jahoda 1961) confirms the idea that images indeed are not always shared, but can differ from person to person and group to group. Carrier’s theory on the way in which images are constructed, as I partly described above, makes this understandable. Although Carrier admits that there are some “common underlying themes among the different images”, he argues that pulling them out would ignore their obvious diversity. According to Carrier, the different images can be seen as elements of a “pool of images”, from which people can choose a certain image:

*People select one or another element as standing for the West according to their circumstances, which includes both their relative position to the Western centres of power and the nature of the thing they want to distinguish from the West. Of course,*

*because orient and occident generate each other dialectically, the very nature of the thing they desire to distinguish from the West is in part a product of that pool of images* (Carrier 1995: 26).

I have to add that Carrier mainly refers to diversity in circumstances (and hence images) between societies, communities or (sub-) cultures. He therefore still speaks of, for example, “the image the Zulus have” (Carrier 1995: 22). Yet what I question is if there is such thing as “a Frafra image of the West” or that the images differ from person to person

Said struggled with a similar dilemma of the general and particular, which he calls two perspectives on the same material. He wonders how to “recognize individuality and to reconcile it with its intelligent, and by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context? (1978: 9). The solution he gives is to study Orientalism “as a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by three great empires-British, French, American- in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced” (Said: 1978: 15).

I agree with Carrier’s emphasis on the diversity of the images because I believe that people can construct different and even conflicting images because of their different living conditions and interests, education and future prospects. I expect that they can interpret information differently and perceive history in different ways, even if they live in the same neighbourhood. But I also understand Said’s point that the general, dominating context cannot be ignored. Therefore, I will, in line with Said, pay attention to both levels. I want to search for elements in the images that stand out as typical for images of the West in Upper East Ghana. The analysis of these common elements will be by looking at the shared context such as cultural, political and economic features of the region. Next to that, I will examine the individual, different images I encountered and will I try to find out how the personal context can help to explain this.

### ***Concluding Remarks: starting points for my thesis***

In this thesis, it is not my aim to point out whether the images of the West are indeed constructed in a process of dialectical definition, whereby the essences of the own and the other world are being opposed and differences heightened. I think this would be stating the obvious. As Carrier writes: “It is difficult to imagine how people could conduct research, much less live their daily lives, in any other way” (Carrier 1995: 26). When people are asked to describe a far-away place they have never been to, it is natural that they come up with a distorted, essentialist rendering, emphasising the elements they think are different from their

own world. Yet what is interesting is how this process is brought into practice; which essences they choose (both from their own world and the West) and why that particular choice is made.

I am aware that, by taking Occidental/Orientalist thought as a starting-point in my analysis, I have already answered part of (the second part of) my research question, (that is: *how* are the images constructed) Yet there is still much to be found out about this process of construction. What are the different connections with the West in the region, in the past and today (slave trade, colonisation, media, migration and imported consumer goods) and which of these are reflected in the images of the West? How do these connections together with the realities and perceptions of the informant's own situation determine what is relevant to enter the consciousness? Is the entire past of connections with the West reflected in today's images or have only certain elements survived? And if the latter is the case, how can be explained that certain influences persist up to now, while others have disappeared?

And with regard to Appadurai's writings, the question arises if media and migration indeed cause the awareness of possible lives, situated in the West. And if they do, does this awareness change people's ideas about their own situation and does it even make them want to move to another place?

Another matter that I will look at is the question of collectivity versus individuality. Are the images I encountered shared by the entire community or hence only formed by shared, collective context? Or can images differ from person to person or group to group, which makes that the different situations people within the community live in should be examined?

Many questions have arisen and there is a lot to be found out about the images of the West in The Upper East Region of Ghana. I hope to demonstrate that is not merely the content of the images ("How do they imagine us?") that is fascinating, but that it is the ideas about what is important in the informants' lives that these images reveal.

## **§ 1.2 The Research Question: Shifting focus of research**

The research question I had formulated beforehand, and with which I entered the field, consisted of three parts. The first part was **what images do people have of "the West"** (roughly meaning Europe, the United States and Canada). The second part was concerned with the production of these images through information from mass media, village members

living abroad, contact with Westerners or the conception of history: **how are these images constructed?** The final part constituted the link to the issue of migration: **how do the existing images and ideas influence the desire to migrate to the West?**

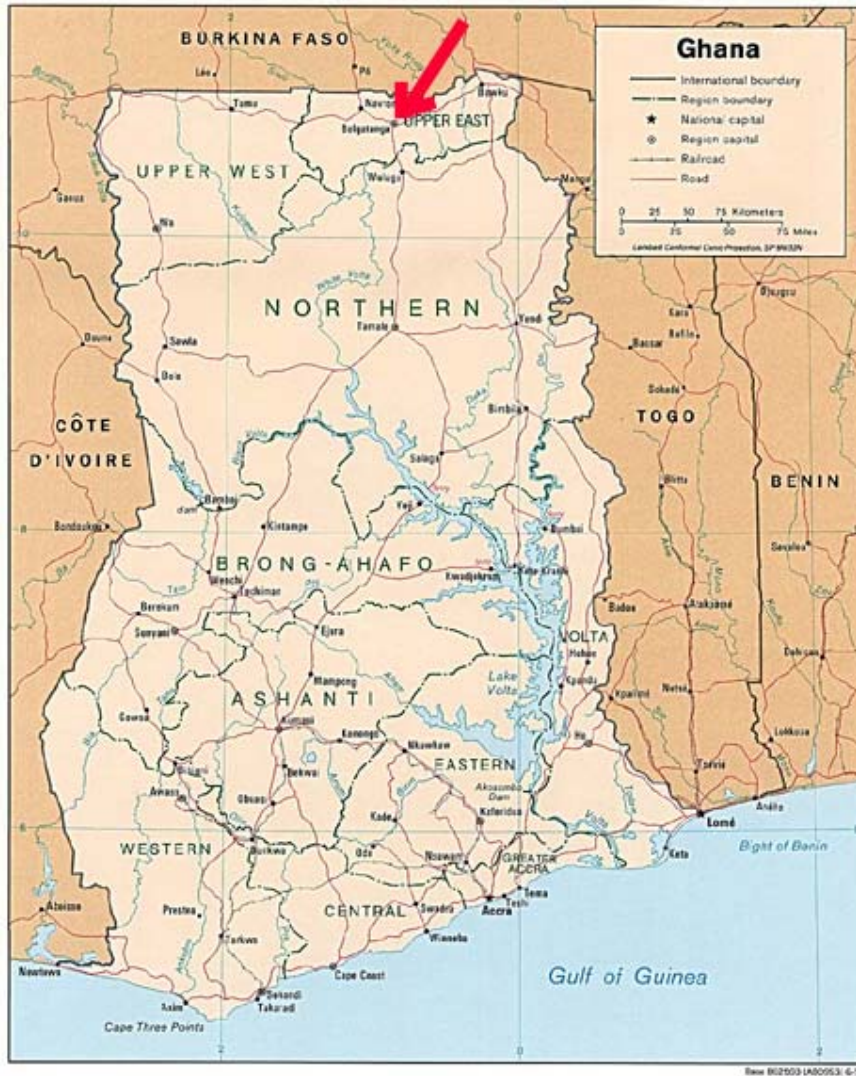
During my fieldwork and while analysing the data I gathered afterwards, it became clear to me that the question as formulated above needed to be changed. The last part of the question (**how do the images and ideas influence the desire to migrate?**), turned out to be problematic. Determining the relation between specific images and the desire to migrate is hard. One would need to compare the images of many different people, categorised according to their desire to migrate, but that is almost impossible. In the case of my research the desire to migrate was often vague, because people believed that, mostly for financial reasons, it was no real option for them. Only a few people had a more concrete desire or plan, mostly because they had more financial or educational assets.

I cannot deny that there was another factor that made it difficult to determine what the informants' ideas or plans were concerning migration, for themselves or their children. This factor has to do with the idea of reflexivity, which says that data are always a result of communication and contact between the researcher and the informant that this interaction inevitably influences data (see Chapter 3: Fieldwork). In my case the researcher was a white person, asking if they wanted to migrate to the West. Since an easy channel to reach the West happens to be through contact with residents of the West, telling me that they actually never considered going there could have the serious consequence of ruining an opportunity to go. Therefore, answers to such a question were not likely to provide an accurate picture.

Yet this does not mean that the issue of migration is excluded from this study. I will still look at the ideas people have about migration to and living in the West; I will examine if and how people imagine the West as a destination of migration. But analysing a causal relation, as stated above, did not turn out relevant in my case, upon closer scrutiny. Taking this into consideration, the question that now forms the focus of my thesis is:

**“What do images of the West in Northeast Ghana look like and how are they constructed?”**

## Chapter 2: Ethnographic context: ethnic, historical and geographical background



### § 2.1 Frafra, Grushi or Boonsi?

This thesis is about people living in the Upper East Region in Ghana. The Upper East Region, the Upper West Region and the Northern Region together constitute what is generally referred to as Northern Ghana. More specifically, the thesis is concerned with certain inhabitants of the villages of Kunkua, Gowrie, Bongo and the city of Bolgatanga. The distance between any of these places is never more than fifteen kilometres. Since I spent most of my time in

Kunkua and since I did the majority of my interviews there, Kunkua can be seen as the base of exploration as well as the main location of my fieldwork. Bongo, Gowrie and Bolga are connected by dirt roads; Kunkua can be reached via small paths. The Upper East Region is divided into six districts. Gowrie, Kunkua and Bongo are part of Bongo district, of which Bongo is the capital. Bolgatanga (Bolga) is in Bolgatanga district. Ethnically, both Bongo district and Bolga district are the original home of the Frafra people, although in particular Bolgatanga has known a lot of immigration from other ethnic groups.

The label “Frafra” needs some elaboration. Although the term is used throughout Ghana to refer to the people living in the area I studied, when I asked my informants to which tribe or ethnic group they belonged, “Frafra” was seldom their response. The informants in Kunkua, Gowrie and Bolga called themselves “Grushi” (or Gurensi/ Gurense/Nankansi/Frafra proper) or Gruni, which is, according to Richard, the name of the language of the Grushi people. In Bongo all informants identified themselves as Boonsi<sup>3</sup>.

Most people were familiar with the name Frafra but they only identified themselves with that term when I asked them if they were a Frafra. This can be explained by the fact that the term Frafra is in fact an overarching term for different ethnic groups that have no traditional political unity, invented by the first white men who entered the area. Meyer Fortes wrote in 1945 that the Kusasi, Nabdam, Grushi and Tallensi were more allied in culture and language *inter se* than they were with other neighbouring “tribes”. “Since the coming of white men they have been called “the Farafaras” and they are beginning to accept this appellation, which is said to be derived from one of their customary expressions of greeting, *ni-I fara-fara-fara*” (Fortes 1945: 16; Hart 1971: 22). In more recent literature the Kusasis are not longer seen as Frafras (Hart 1971; Saaka 2001). Nabila (1975: 70) thereby recognises the Boonsi group as Frafra sub-group. According to Nabila as well as my experiences from the field, there are basically four ethnic groups in the Frafra area: the Grushi (Nankanse), the Boonsi, the Nabdam and the Tallensi.

Migration to the South of Ghana by members of these groups stimulated the adoption of the term Frafra, which first crystallised out from early army and labour recruitment documents. Migrants away from home came to share a common identity and organisation in relation to other tribal groups represented in the towns in the South. Administrative policies that created two Frafra local councils as administrative units furthermore reinforced this process. Keith Hart writes:

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<sup>3</sup> According to my informants, the Boonsi had come from the Mamprusi area in the past and their language had mixed with the Grushi language

*All group terminologies are situational, but these factors have combined to give the Frafras a unitary identity which is relevant both in the homeland and in the wider national context; and, despite their internal divisions, this unity is reinforced by cultural homogeneity, in patterns of settlement, lineage organization etc. of a substantial nature. For the Frafras, therefore, the modern tribe has acquired a meaning that it historically lacked (Hart 1971: 22).*

I noticed small differences in the languages spoken in the Grushi and Boonsi area. For example the greeting “Good morning” was different in the two places only a few miles away from each other. Apart from this linguistic matter, I did not come across obvious differences between the sub-groups. Hart (1971) argues that, among the different Frafra groups, the Grushi (the ethnic group most of my informants saw themselves part of) can be considered the least well-defined category. He argues that “Though they have some linguistic means of differentiating them from their neighbours, historically they lacked any group identity beyond clan settlement of an individual’s birth” (Hart 1971: 22).

Although the term Boonsi was common among my informants, only Nabila (1975) mentions it as the fourth Frafra sub-group, others use Nabdam to refer to people living in the Bongo area. This is probably due to the vague (sub-)ethnic boundaries and means of differentiating, which are not easily observed by outsiders.

These side notes to the Frafra label show that it is a recently invented, overarching term and that using it is surely not self-evident. Taking this into account, I still think using the category in my study is appropriate. It is convenient because the different places where I carried out research are all located in the two (administratively defined) Frafra districts (the former local councils)<sup>4</sup>. Besides that, the name Frafra is much better known in literature as well as throughout Ghana, than the terms Boonsi and Grushi. But of course there are reasons that are much more imperative for my choice to use the term “Frafras”, than these rather practical motives. Firstly, it is the linguistic and cultural intelligibility between the sub-groups as well as the social and spatial interaction between them that show their resemblance and connectedness. Secondly, the people under concern do recognize the term and even use it in contrast to other ethnic groups which demonstrates that there certainly is a feeling of unity among them. So although the Frafra category was initially mainly a colonial construction, it has, through time, become meaningful to the Frafra people themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> It has to be noted that some of my informants were originally not from the Frafra area, something I will then mention.



## § 2.2 History of the region

The images the Frafra have of the West can only be understood in the context of what has happened in their area in the past. Obviously, this history is part of a larger picture in which interests of other African ethnic groups, European colonising powers and the nation of Ghana often seemed to determine their fate. In this paragraph I will look at the history of Northern Ghana and the Frafra homeland in particular. Nevertheless, I will not provide a full account of the area's past. I will on the contrary focus on what I think is most relevant for my study, such as contact with Westerners, patterns of migration to the South and the introduction and establishment of Christianity and Western education.

Part of my fieldwork was to find out how the past was *imagined* by my informants, in what ways they remembered the slave raids and the white presence in history. This is important because the local ideas and images about the past help to explain the construction and meaning of the images of the West I encountered. I will present these perceptions and the stories about the past in the chapter on Historical Origins (Chapter 4), because they are part of my results and lead to answering my central question. This chapter however is reserved to provide background information to the research I carried out, predominantly drawn from secondary literature.

### *The pre-colonial period*

With the arrival of the Portuguese at Ghana's coast in 1471, intensive trade networks developed between several European powers and African coastal tribes. Initially gold was the main attraction for the European traders, but after 1650 slaves became the most important commodities. The Dutch, English, French, Scandinavians and Portuguese bought slaves with European products and shipped them to plantations in America. From there, products from the plantations such as sugar, cotton, coffee and tobacco were brought back to Europe. This so-called Atlantic slave trade lasted until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was abolished by the different European powers. The area that now constitutes the three Northern regions of Ghana, did not get involved in this Atlantic slave trade until the mid-eighteenth century. Until then, the slaves that were exported to the New World came from the coastal states and the inland states bordering Ashanti<sup>5</sup> (Der 1998: 7).

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<sup>5</sup> The Ashanti kingdom with its capital Kumasi was situated in South/ midsouth Ghana. The Ashantis belong to the larger Akan ethnic group.

It was the invasion of two Northern states (Gonja and Dagbon) by the Ashanti in 1744 (Benzing 1971: 183) that drew the North into the worldwide network of slavery. The Ashanti, who had been trading with the Europeans for centuries, controlled the North through a system of tribute, which they made the Gonja and Dagbon to pay <sup>6</sup>. This annual tribute included hundreds of slaves. In order to meet these obligations, the Gonja and Dagbon chiefs, and the Mamprusi and Wala, organised raids into non-centralised areas further North, like the area I studied (Saaka 2001: 140). A raid meant that armed men would enter a village to carry away men, women and children as well as their property such as cattle, sheep and goats. The “left-over” captives, who were not needed to pay the tribute, were sold at markets (Der 1998: 12).

Probably there were also powerful (Ashanti) individuals who engaged in slave raiding on their own accounts, next to the organised Gonja and Dagomba raids (Der 1998: 12). Yet the majority of the slaves brought to Ashanti got there as part of the Northern tribute to the Ashanti Court (Saaka 2001: 140). The Ashanti managed to exploit the Northerners in this way until 1874, when they were defeated by the British in the Anglo-Ashanti war in 1873-1874. Exporting the slaves had become impossible with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, but the slaves were now used as labourers and domestic servants in Ashanti society.

Nevertheless, the end of the Gonja and Dagomba raids did not mean stability or security for the people living in what is now Northern Ghana. There were new competitors in the field, from Northern direction this time, the Zabarima slave raiders from the region of Niamey in modern Niger. These people who initially entered the area as horse traders, raided villages in the North and sold their captives in the Gonja town Salaga, which was at that time the most important commercial centre and slave market in Northern Ghana. The raiding and trading reached its peak after about 1885, when a man called Babatu became the leader of the Zabarima. The ruthless slave trader Babatu is still vividly remembered in what are now the Upper East and Upper West regions of Ghana. With the help of guns, Babatu and his helpers could destroy whole communities, among which Frafra towns and villages (Der 1998: 21).

Often bracketed together with Babatu in oral accounts is Samori, who controlled the last few years of the slave trade in Northern Ghana (Der 1998: 23; Tengan 1991: 195; own results). According to Der however, Samori’s actions did not extend to the region I studied; the Upper East. He operated in Western Gonja and in the North-West of Ghana. British intervention in 1897 forced both the Zabarima and the Samorian slave raiders to cease their raids. Samori was captured by the French in 1898 and sent to Gabon. The partition of the

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<sup>6</sup> Der (1998) argues that in case of the Dagombas it was in fact a debt that had to be paid instead of tribute.

middle Volta basin between Germany, Britain and France in 1898 further cut off the routes to the North (Der 1998: 24).

Before and during the period described above, there were also other forms of what can be called slavery, which did not involve predatory raiding. The most common form was the sale of kin. Children were exchanged for grain with neighbouring groups in times of hunger. It was in fact a system of pawning in which the children were the pawns. Sometimes children were even taken away by distant relatives or neighbours and sold without permission of their parents. Some of the children did eventually return to their home when the grain was repaid, but many did not. They could be incorporated in the families they had bought them or they could be sold at the markets (Piot 1996: 34; oral accounts Kunkua).

The different kinds of slave trade all had the effect of breeding insecurity. Moving between villages was dangerous and no one was certain of their lives (Der 1998: 30). Benedict Der also concludes that the slave trade retarded development “the insecure conditions of life did not favour development of local skills and many people with such skills were captured in raids and sold as slaves” (Der 1998: 31).

### ***The British influence, missionaries and migration***

Until the end of the nineteenth century the British from their base on the Gold Coast, had not made any moves to bring the area North of the Ashanti under their sphere of influence. Yet when the British and German powers in the neighbouring areas started to show interest to expand their colonies, the British started to make efforts to occupy the region. From 1897, they started to make military expeditions into the North and in 1901, the annexation of “the Northern Territories” by the British to the Gold Coast was officially confirmed with a treaty between the French and the Germans (Tengan 1991: 195).

The “pacification” of the North by the British was not easy because they received considerable resistance from the local population. It was not until 1907 that relative peace was established in the region and that the first civil administration was established (Tengan 1912: 195). The colonisers put pressure on local chiefs who became the agents of the British administration and enforced labour for the construction of roads, the provision of carriers, wood and water for the white men. (Cleveland 1991; Sutton 1989; Der 2001: 57). Taxes were also imposed by the colonisers (Tengan 1991: 197).

Soon after the British invaded the North, they concluded that the exploitable natural resources in the North were limited, compared to the economic possibilities of the Ashanti. The southern soil and climate made it possible to produce exportable products like cocoa,

rubber, palm oil, timber, kola nuts and minerals. Less favourable conditions in the North and the long distance from the coast provided fewer opportunities for export production in these regions. Besides that, tax revenues from this region (mostly on livestock and kola) were very limited. As a result, the British decided to concentrate on the North's only recognized export commodity: manpower. They designed policies for the North that were not directed towards development and education of the area and lacked in agricultural and infra-structural investments. Although some programmes were set up to enable Northerners to earn more money at home, these were at least inconsistent and ambivalent (Sutton 1989: 637; Saaka 2001)

The Southern dependence on labour from the North, in commercial agriculture, mining and other enterprises, helps to explain this. It was beneficial for the colonial administration to have the disposal over a pool of cheap, unskilled labour. Cleveland writes:

*While colonial policy was not always consistent, one dominant and ultimately effective strategy seems evident: to break up locally self-sufficient economies and societies in order to stimulate the temporary migration of labour from largely subsistence agriculture to work in commercial agriculture, mining and public works in the South. These sectors were directly tied to the European economy for the benefit of Britain. Low wages and poor working conditions encouraged most migrants to return to their savannah villages when they were sick, injured or too old to work (Cleveland 1991: 238).*

This "strategy" did not only mean the neglect of the North in terms of colonial expenditures, the British also actively encouraged migration to the South. Since 1880, the colonial military had obtained labour for local use in the North by direct force and putting pressure on chiefs. After the turn of the century they started setting up arrangements that facilitated the miners and cocoa farmers to recruit labourers. In addition, they recruited Northerners to work for large government projects such as the construction of railways and harbours (Saaka 2001: 4; Thomas 1973). From the Northeast, the first groups travelled down in 1909 (Cleveland 1991: 229). Between 1920 and 1924, the recruitment was even virtually forced labour, when government officials gave chiefs quotas they had to meet. Next to the government-sanctioned recruitment, there were illegal recruiters, especially in the area around Bolgatanga I studied. They took people South without telling them where they were going or what they were going to do (Nabila 1975: 72).

This pattern of long-distance (both seasonal and permanent) migration, which was initiated and sometimes enforced by the colonisers, has continued throughout the twentieth century up to today. Although the system of recruitment of labour by government and private businesses ended in the late twenties, improvement of the transportation system and the rather difficult living conditions in the area still made an increasing number of people decide to go South. Since the 1930s, out-migration has been a permanent phenomenon among the Frafras (Fortes 1945; Nabila 1975; Seidu 2001). Money was needed to purchase food if the farm produce was not sufficient, but reasons to migrate were not mere economical. The desire to “see a bit of the world”, to escape family control or the desire to acquire some skills could also influence the decision (Nabila 1975; Hart 1971; Fortes 1945: 10).

### ***Perspectives on Frafra land in the 1930s and 1960s***

The anthropologist Meyer Fortes studied the Tallensi, a Frafra tribe, in the 1930s and his writings (1936; 1945) give an interesting historical perspective on the developments in the area during that time. Fortes emphasises that the construction of a motorway which connected Kumasi (the capital of Ashanti) with the North, immensely facilitated all types of travelling southwards, either on foot or by lorry (Fortes 1936: 42). He signals the rise of migration to the South during this period:

*Today young men and even women go in increasing numbers every year, in the dry season to Tamale, Kumasi, or the coast towns. Some go to visit friends or relatives, some carry fowls for sale, others go as seasonal labourers, and others go to work abroad<sup>7</sup> for a term of years (Fortes 1945: 10).*

And:

*It has become linked with the normal economic life of the natives. Whereas, in former years, a young man moved out temporarily to the periphery of settlement on account of a shortage of land in his natal community, nowadays he often goes to Ashanti or the mines as a labourer (Fortes 1936: 38).*

The large number of migrants shows that Frafra villages were not isolated from the rest of the world at that time. Still, Fortes maintains that before the Second World War, the Frafras were only little affected by the rapid developments in the Gold Coast or by the white presence in the area. “The migrant learns the techniques, the manners and the skills of town life...but all this drops off like an old coat when he returns”, writes Fortes (1936: 51). And: “I was

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<sup>7</sup> Note that in this case “abroad” refers to everything outside Taleland.

constantly amazed, for instance, by the great tolerance shown to strangers or to foreign ways and ideas without apparent desire to imitate” (1936: 38).

Yet, according to Fortes, people were surely interested in the world “abroad”, which was referred to as “Kumasi”, the capital of Ashanti and the symbol for everything south of the Black Volta. From Fortes’ observations I can draw the idea that imagination of a (relatively) different world was a common practice in these days. Imagination of an elsewhere, where life might be better. Fortes: “Men of intelligence above the ordinary show keen interest in descriptions of life in the towns, and know a good deal about it, in spite of never having travelled beyond the tribal boundaries. Even children have vague ideas about “Kumasi”. Fortes observed that “Anyone who comes back from a visit abroad displays himself in the market-place at the first opportunity and recounts his experiences to his friends”.

Migration to the South (“a more Europeanised territory” -Fortes 1936: 37) also brought other symbols to the area such as European garments, clothes, European manufactured utensils and chairs. Fortes writes that money and clothes were eagerly desired by the Tallensi, being the most important new wants that had arisen as a result of “culture contact” (1945: 11) . Hausa and Yoruba traders also sold foreign things such as locks and keys, scissors and cigarettes. According to Fortes however, demand for these articles was low which was also caused by the fact that the ordinary household could not afford them.

Fortes’ description (1945) about a part of the Frafra homeland in the 1930s, shows that the construction of a road had opened up the area and that many contacts with the outside world existed. Yet he still paints a picture that is hardly influenced by European influences, in terms of education and political organisation. Keith Hart (1971: 22) on Fortes (1936): “He could point out that literacy and Christianity had barely touched the Tallensi and that the colonial interventions of British rule had not seriously undermined the vigour of native institution.” The situation in the rural areas I studied must have been quite similar. In Bolgatanga after 1927 the situation might have been slightly different with the arrival of a parish and a missionary school. Bolga however was still small and the developments did not seem to influence the surrounding rural areas to any large degree.

Harts observations thirty years later, however, demonstrate that changes have been rapid between the thirties and late sixties. Writing more than thirty years ago, he made it clear that “modernisation is thus an all-pervasive factor in the Frafra homeland” (1971: 23) and therefore is not as recent as one may assume today. Keith Hart:

*Today, in contrast with the pre-war situation, experience of urban conditions and migration are no longer synonymous for Frafras - the nature of their homeland has*

*been transformed by the emergence of a booming entrepot and administrative centre in Bolgatanga. A town of some 10.000 people, a marketing centre at one of West-Africa's main crossroads, the capital since 1961 of Ghana's Upper region<sup>8</sup>, a centre for religious and educational institutions, a factory and a thriving public works industry- all has sprung up within an hour's walking distance of Fortes' Tongo and less than twenty miles from the remotest Frafra village. So that it is no longer necessary to travel hundreds of miles to the nearest major town; the modern world is now on every Frafra's doorstep (Hart 1971: 23).*

### **Contact with whites and Christianity**

Migration was obviously not the only source of contact with the Gold Coast or the Western world. Being a British protectorate, the Northern territories had British officials living in or travelling to the area. Besides that, starting from 1906, white catholic missionaries had settled in the area, setting up churches and converting local people to Christianity (McCoy 1988). An interesting question to look at is in what degree the presence of these white "contact agents" (Fortes 1936) was felt in the area and in what ways they influenced life in the Upper East Region. Also, the confrontation with the first white people must have evoked strong feelings and might have been influential to the way whites are looked at today. This latter issue I will discuss this in the chapter on Historical Origins, in which I will deal with the way historical events have influenced current images of the West

The main characteristic of the Europeans in the area is that they were few, and did not settle permanently. In the rural areas there was only the District Commissioner who represented the colonial government. Unfamiliarity with white people made their appearance an interesting sight. Fortes: "the District Commissioner's movements, when he is on trek in the vicinity, are watched by everybody with curiosity." After the pacification that needed armed manpower, there were not many British present in the area. The climate and dangerous tropical diseases prohibited many whites to enter the area and leave it alive. Besides that, the policy of "indirect rule", that was introduced as the official policy since the 1930s made large presence of British unnecessary. The government exercised its authority through the medium of chiefs under the local supervision of district commissioners (Jahoda 1961: 7; Fortes 1936; Tengan 1991: 196).

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<sup>8</sup> The Upper Region is now divided in two separate Regions: the Upper West Region and the Upper East Region

One side effect of the invasions of the Zabarima and Samorian slave traders from the North had been the conversion to Islam by a small percentage of the population of (what is now) the Upper East Region (Kirby 1998). The majority however stuck to their traditional religion, which focuses on the ancestors and the land. In 1906, Christianity was introduced in Northern Ghana by the Society of Missionaries of Africa, generally known as the White Fathers. The colonial government gave permission to two Canadian White Fathers to open a mission station in Navrongo, a town about twenty kilometres from Bolgatanga. (Der 2001: 109; MacCoy 1988). About twenty years later, a parish was opened in Bolgatanga. This Bolga parish later started opening out-stations in Tongo (in Taleland) and Bongo (Der 2001: 109; MacCoy 1988).

It was not until the 1970s that the Christianisation of the population in the rural areas of Kunkua and Bongo started off on a large scale. In 1970, the Bongo out-station had become a parish with a resident-priest, Father Armand Lebel. This French-Canadian priest died some twenty years ago but is still vividly remembered by the local population. Winning souls was a difficult enterprise for several reasons. People initially feared and avoided if possible the suspicious-looking foreigners, though later it brought some sort of status to be associated with the white men (MacCoy 1988: 30-31; oral accounts Bongo). The white fathers tried to get in contact with the communities through persons from the community, whom they gave jobs as catechists or interpreters, hoping that they would later bring their families. For many, however, becoming a Christian meant being ostracized by the family. Settling around the church ground with the fathers was then often the best option (interview father David 2002, Bongo).

Other, protestant missions followed the white fathers in the North. For example the Basel mission commenced work in Yendi and Methodists missionaries established a mission post in Tamale. But the Catholic White Fathers remained the most influential evangelists in the North. They did not confine themselves to pastoral work but also brought useful medicines to the area and spent a lot of time on medical work. The British had until then shown little interest in improving the health care in the region. Through time, the Catholic Church also came to play an important role in the regional and local social and political structure. She set up schools and today many organisations. Still, many NGO's are affiliated with and sponsored by the Catholic Church. Several groups, such as women, youth or widows, have regular meetings organised through the Catholic Church. It has to be noted that today the priests are no longer foreigners. Nowadays, Ghanaians, mostly even Frafras, preach the gospel. Recently, new protestant churches have opened up in the region as well. Following



a national Ghanaian trend (van Dijk 2002; Meyer 2003: 159), so-called Charismatic Churches, such as the Pentecost and “Seeds across the Nation” have become increasingly popular.

### ***Formal Western Education***

The history of Western education in North Ghana also shows the agenda of the British: establishing a labour reserve for the South meant the provision of limited and inferior education to the Northern minorities. The British did not see a reason to educate the Northerners at a more than basic level and in this way peasant consciousness and protest would be limited, so they would not be able to call for a more balanced development of the country. Restricting the opening of mission schools was also part of this policy. As a result, at independence there was a complete absence of an educated, trained and skilled human resource in Northern Ghana, in contrast to Southern Ghana (Songsore 2001: 224-225).

Missionary societies saw the establishment of schools as instrumental to their main task of evangelisation. Opening schools was a way to attract young people and education would enable converts to read the bible and learn about the new faith. Through education they also hoped to bring about social change and exercise some moral influence on the new converts (Der 2001: 107).

In 1907, the White Fathers had opened the first school in Navrongo and thereby introduced formal Western education in the Northern Territories. The three R’s, some maths, reading and some technical skills as well as some geography and history were taught by the Fathers in English (Der 1998: 109)<sup>9</sup>. The number of pupils was low: in 1909, 29 boys were attending the school in Navrongo. Because education was such a new phenomenon in the region, attendance was very irregular. Parents were reluctant to send their children to school, especially in the rainy seasons when they needed their sons on the farms (MacCoy 1988).

Between 1914 and 1925 the missionaries in Navrongo even had to close the school because of a lack of funds. In 1921, the colonial government had opened four schools in the North but education was still limited to a very small minority. With respect to my research area: no schools were opened in Bolgatanga or Navrongo. Der comments:

*Thus nearly after twenty years of effective colonial rule in the North, the British administration had only four schools in the area. By 1922, the total enrolment in these*

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<sup>9</sup> Setting up a school where English would be taught was one of the conditions of the British when permitting the missionaries to open the mission station in 1906.

*schools was just 243 in a population estimated at 631.139 persons of whom at least a third or more would have been children of school-going age (Der 1971: 23).*

In 1927, the first school in Bolgatanga was opened by the White Fathers. A year later, the first girls' school was established in Navrongo. Yet new British policies were severely disturbing the expansion of education. Practical skills and craftwork were to form the basis of the Northern education, not academic education. It was laid down as a policy that the highest level of education was to be primary six, except at a special school that would be set up in Tamale. Furthermore, no new schools were to be opened without permission and classes were not allowed to be larger than twenty-five pupils.

After "indirect rule" was introduced as the official colonial policy in the 1930s, the British tried to make education a privilege for the children of the chiefs or other likely successors to chiefship. The colonial administration felt that until the members of the ruling classes who formed the Native Administration were educated well ahead of those of the ruled, the children of the common people were not to be educated at all. A result was that only an elitist minority was admitted in the government schools and that the expansion of missionary schools, which admitted people from all classes, was further restricted (Der 2001).

After 1950 education in the North saw an accelerated growth. The loosening grip of the British made it possible for the missionaries to set up schools. Thereby, governmental policies now began to include a modest demand for opening up new government schools in the North. The 1960s and 70s, just after Ghana's independence in 1957, meant a major boost on Northern education. Ghana's first president Nkrumah Northern leaders had exerted pressure in the time of independence on both colonial government and the immediate post-independence government. This resulted in a special scholarship scheme for Northerners, which tried to stimulate Northerners to go to school by reducing education costs. Only a small fragment of it remains in place today. (Songsore 2001: 226).

Again, in 1992, the constitution of President Rawlings "Fourth republic" provided that basic education should be free, compulsory and available to all. Secondary education should be accessible for everyone, on basis of capacity, with emphasis on the introduction of free education. This plan has not yet become reality. Still, school attendance in the Upper East is low; around thirty percent of people aged between six and eighteen go to school. Lack of money for fees, uniforms and books and the need to work at home are the most given reasons for non-attendance (Songsore 2001: 233; Skalnik 1992).

The outcome of this history of education in the North has been obvious: recent statistics show that over eighty percent of the people in Northern Ghana (Upper West, Upper

East and Northern Regions) have never been to school. In the Upper East Region, a mere twelve percent of the population aged above fifteen can read and write, contrasting with a national average of forty-eight percent (Songsore 2001: 232.).

### ***Concluding remarks***

This history shows some remarkable aspects of Northern Ghana's past. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the influence of the Europeans who had arrived on the coast in the fifteenth century, was only indirectly felt. Because of the Atlantic slave trade the Europeans had set up, the Ashanti wanted to have the disposal over large amounts of people to sell. In order to achieve this, the Ashanti forced other ethnic groups to raid the most Northern, least centralised peoples. After this period of slave raids had ended, the Northerners faced a new threat, one that was not connected to European trade networks. Slave raiders from the North, what is now called Niger, plundered around the area during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The colonial period was not characterised by a large amount of British officials or the settlement of British in the area. The most salient effect of their occupation was the establishment of a large migration stream southwards. The British policies were designed to encourage this labour migration and very little effort was put in developing the area itself. Partly as a result of these British policies, the advent of Christianity and Western education happened relatively slowly. Conversion to Christianity and school enrolment in the Upper East rural areas did not occur on a large scale until after Ghana's independence in 1957.

Yet this history also shows that the Frafra had all different sorts of contacts with places other than their own, that must have triggered the imagination of "the Other" or an elsewhere. With the arrival of the British in the area, images of the South as well as of the home of the whites became increasingly relevant for the Frafra. The imagination of the South was both affected by and influential to the increasing migration to the South. Accidental encounters with white strangers (District Commissioners, missionaries or anthropologists like Fortes himself) in the area, as well as their administrative, missionary or educational activities must have caused ideas about whites and their homeland.

In Chapter 5, I will take a more detailed look at how current images of the West can be explained historically. On the one hand I will examine the local perception of historical phenomena such as slave trade and colonial suppression and its influence on images of the West. On the other hand, I will look at how both Christian missionary activities and the

British education system were influential to the local (self-) images by teaching ideas about Western superiority.

## § 2.3 The Research area today

### *The Upper East Region*

*The traveller in West Africa who enters this region from the south is impressed by the contrast with the forest belt. According to his predictions he will view it with pleasure or dismay after the massive and gigantic gloom of the forest. Here are no trees a hundred or two hundred feet high rooted amid thick undergrowth and developed in tenacious creepers. The orchard bush country is a vast plain, in some parts monotonously flat, in others parts gently undulating and diversified by an occasional range of hills or a steep scarp (Meyer Fortes 1945: *The dynamics of clanship among the Tallensi*).*

### *Kunkua, Upper East Region*

In ecological terms, my research area is generally referred to as guinea savannah woodland, orchard bushland or tree savannah. Its natural vegetation consists of savannah grasses, shrubs and scattered trees. Stones and rocks stick out of the ground and are characteristic for the scenery. The area is generally flat, although around Bongo the area is fairly undulating (Kasanga 1994).

The Upper East Region is the area with the lowest rainfall in the country. There is only one rainy season, which roughly lasts from May until October. It is however irregular, with dry spells during this period. Apart from the minority that has access to irrigated plots, this is the only time of the year that farmers can cultivate the fields. Yet, unexpected dry spells in the rainy season do sometimes result in complete crop failure. Temperatures are generally high, ranging between about 20 and 45 degrees Celsius. A few months after the rainy season, the Harmattan comes in; a strong, very dry, dust-laden wind from the North. Highest temperatures are reached from March to May before the rainy season starts (Obengo 2001). During my stay in the area from the beginning of October until Christmas, I experienced different conditions. My first nights in the village coincided with the last heavy rains, which

soon meant the start of the harvesting season. In the course of my stay the weather became cooler and dryer and when I left, a dusty Harmattan had begun to blow.

The Upper East Region is more densely populated than the two other Northern regions. The average population density is 104 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, compared to respectively 31 and 26 in the Upper West and Northern Regions. It is also higher than the national average of 77 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (Ghana Statistical Services 2000). Population growth however, with an annual percentage of 1.1, has not been as large as in many other Ghanaian regions (national average: 2.5). This can be explained by the large numbers of people that move to Southern Ghana or certain parts of the Northern Region.

Statistics also show the region's unmistakably rural character. Only 8.5 % of the population lives in the urban centres, which is the lowest level of urbanisation in the country. Besides that, industrialisation is virtually non-existent in the area. With the industrial core being concentrated around Accra, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi in the South, hardly any industrial companies have been established in the region (Songsore 2001: 211).

### ***The research setting:***

#### ***Bolgatanga***

I will start the description of my research setting by painting a picture of Bolgatanga, the capital of the Upper East Region. Although I spent only a few weeks of my three months research in this city and although only a minority of my informants was based in this place, I think the city deserves considerable attention. Situated within a fifteen-kilometre distance from all my rural informants, Bolgatanga is frequently visited by most of my informants. As Hart already wrote in the late 1960s, its size –considerably grown since then- atmosphere and location on a crossroads of motorways to both Burkina Faso and Accra, make it a cosmopolitan place within their reach.

Bolga, as it is called throughout Ghana, has a population size of about 50.000 people (Republic of Ghana. 2000 Population and Housing census). The city centres around a market place, where a large market is held every third day. Products on offer range from all kinds of farm produce, second hand clothing from the West, African cloths, kitchen utensils, beauty products, manufactured foods and livestock. Next to the market is a lorry park. At one side there are large trucks. At the other side, cars (shared taxis) wait to fill up to leave to the surrounding towns and villages. Overcrowded minibuses (so-called trotros) leave to more distant destinations such as Tamale. Coach services to Kumasi and Accra leave from a station

nearby. The reconstruction of the road connecting Tamale with Bolga a few years ago, has improved Bolga's accessibility dramatically. Travel time by car from Tamale has reduced from almost six to about two and a half hours.

A few steps away from this busy place, is another important spot: the Chief's palace, some white plastered low buildings. In a little ally just off the main road you can often find the chief sitting underneath his shade roof, accompanied by some elders. Another moment you may spot him driving around through the town in his Mercedes. The whole block around the palace, consisting of simple mud houses, is inhabited by the members of the chief's family. The catholic parish occupies a large area just outside the city centre. There is a large church, monasteries, schools, guesthouses and other organisations affiliated to the church. Right in the city centre there is a mosque, with an Arabic schools next to it. At several places through town, small, open-air prayer grounds have been established for Bolga's Muslim minority.

Throughout town there are drinking spots, where bottled beer and soft drinks are sold and loud Western or Ghanaian music is played. More popular among the local (mostly young male) population, and probably better affordable, are the pito bars. These bars are simple, inconspicuous huts where the local beer is drunk from calabashes, with loud local guitar music songs blaring from the speakers.

With regard to access to communication means, there is large post-office offering national and international postal and telephone services and several telecom offices have sprung up in Bolga. There are also two inter-net cafes in town, offering access to the World Wide Web for rates as high as five to ten times the rate in Accra or Kumasi. Connection is irregular and the lines are often down. Moreover, ex-pats are clearly the most regular customers. Televisions are seen outside, in some houses and cafes. The choice is limited to one channel, which offers a mixed selection; CNN news and English spoken informative programmes about German products in the morning. News in local languages (though not in Frafra), discussion programmes, Ghanaian and American soaps and church services fill up the programme. Films can be watched for a small fee in private yards. Signs on the road advertise for the, mostly Nigerian, movies. Ghanaian newspapers can be obtained from a few places.

Bolga's picture is not complete without mentioning the basket market. Every market day, lorries and bicycles buried underneath colourful straw baskets, are driven into town. The weaving of straw hats and baskets is an important economic activity in the surrounding rural

areas. Traders buy them at the basket market and distribute them to the rest of the country and sometimes even the rest of the world.

Another striking feature of Bolga's street life is the high number of white people that regularly appears. They are not tourists, as this part of Ghana is not a very popular tourist destination, but Westerners who work or carry out research in the area. The American Peace Corps as well as the Britain based VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas) are well represented in the area as well as several other international NGO's. In weekends, many of these mostly young westerners meet up in the grocery shop selling some European foods, in the hotels and at the drinking spots.

No detailed secondary literature is available on the city and I may have missed out essential elements: I am aware that this description was largely about the city centre, which is a logical consequence of the fact that that is where I stayed and where my informants lived. Bolga's outskirts consist of mainly traditional houses built by newcomers to the city. I was not able to carry out interviews in this area, probably the poorest part of the city. Neither did I interview any informants living in the large villas on the city edge. I am aware that therefore my research population in Bolgatanga is in no way representative for the whole city.

### ***Gowrie***

The official name of the settlement that is commonly known as Gowrie or Gowrie central is Nayiri, meaning the chiefdom area. Nayiri, Kunkua and four other sections together constitute the Gowrie Chieftaincy, covering an area with about 5000 inhabitants. Evidently, the royal families contesting for the chieftaincy position reside in Nayiri or Gowrie central. The last chief died in 1997 but at the time of my research, the official funeral rituals had not yet been performed. Consequently, no successor could be enskinned<sup>10</sup>. In the meantime, the chiefly duties have been performed by a regent; Frances Anaba Akobga, the late chief's oldest son. According to this regent, the delay is due to difficulties of contacting and gathering all the relatives living overseas. According to other informants however, the high costs of such a ritual is the main obstacle.

Apart from the chief's palaces, the centre of Gowrie is formed by a Secondary school; Gowrie Secondary Technical School. Around the school there are some bungalows for the teachers and other government employees. Further on, there is a junior secondary and a primary school, a Catholic social centre a government clinic and a small Pentecost church.

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<sup>10</sup> In North-Ghana the instalment of chiefs is called enskinment, which refers to the chiefs traditional seat on an animal skin.

There are no real shops, but some simple things can be obtained from a small stall at the junction or the District Assembly man's house. Cooked food is sold at some places. Gowrie is situated on the shores of a lake, which was formed with the construction of the so-called Veadam in 1965. Some irrigated plots and fish ponds have been established.

### ***Kunkua***

Countless little footpaths on the lakeshore, winding through the fields, lead from Gowrie to Kunkua. It is about half an hour walk from one place to the other, passing several farms. On the way, one encounters young children herding cattle, women carrying food or children walking to school.

Kunkua is a so-called dispersed settlement, constituted by roughly 40 farms, each owning its own pieces of land. Furthermore, its infrastructure is constituted by a health clinic where weekly vaccination sessions take place and a primary school. There is also a nursery in the school for the youngest children. Since a few years, there is a motorised grinding mill in the village, to make flour out of the grain, operated by a women's group.

Lacking access to electricity, Kunkua is an exception in the area, since both Gowrie and Bongo have "lights". A shortage of poles at the time of construction is said to be the reason for this. The Kunkua people do not seem to care too much about this, as wiring the house and using electricity would be a costly affair. Clean drinking water can be obtained from several boreholes. The sight of women and girls carrying large metal buckets on their heads is a constant feature of the scenery.

### ***Bongo***

Just behind the farm where I stayed is an invisible border between the Gowrie and Bongo chieftaincies. Yet the pattern of scattered farms, boreholes and fields continues. Roughly five kilometres further is Bongo's centre. A large Catholic church, a market, drinking spots, a pharmacy, little shops, a small car park, a post office and several schools make it a real town with almost 5000 inhabitants (Republic of Ghana. 2000 Population and Housing census) Nevertheless, the centre is small, covering less than half a square kilometre, and consists of simple one-story buildings.

### ***Economic activities***

Economic life in Gowrie, Kunkua and Bongo is predominantly agrarian. Virtually every family deals in at least some sort of farming. With the advent of education, the number of



“workers” (the local name for employed non-farmers) has increased. Frafras work in education, health care and as government officials. Yet hardly any of my informants in this area were currently employed. Just a few were self-employed as carpenters or painters.

The farming is in the first place focused on the production of food for own use; so-called subsistence farming. In good times, surpluses can be sold at markets. The main crops are millet, guinea corn, maize, groundnuts and rice. Besides that, vegetables such as sweet potato, beans, tomatoes, peppers are cultivated. Practically everybody has some kind of livestock, ranging from a few chicken and fowls to a whole animal farm of fowls, ducks, goats, sheep, pigs and donkeys for a donkey cart. Some people in the area have some cattle or a bullock to work on the land.

Yet most families do not rely on farming alone, either subsistence or commercial. Popular activities, especially among rural women, are brewing pito, weaving hats and baskets and selling firewood. Some earn some money from the trade in small things; so-called petty trading. Others sell cooked food or work as a seamstress. Labour migration in the dry season is also an important economic activity among the Frafra people. In the dry season, men and women leave to do work in the Southern sector. International labour migration to the Western world is not very common in the region, although it does occur.

### ***Development organisations in the area***

Since the Upper East Region is considered the poorest region in Ghana (Songsore 2001), it is not surprising that several development organisations are active in the area I studied. Bolgatanga hosts all different local and international governmental and non-governmental organisations involved in agriculture, empowerment of women and children, education and health care. In the rural area around Kunkua, the influence of development agencies on the infrastructure and daily life is evident. Many schools have been established with help from American or European financial assistance, as the sign boards next to the buildings explain. In the secondary schools in Gowrie, Bongo and Bolgatanga (“Big Boss”) European and Japanese teachers are working, who are sent out by British (Voluntary Services Overseas) or Japanese organisations.

The N.G.O. World Vision is based in Bongo and has its employees’ bungalows in Gowrie and their four-wheel drive cars are regularly seen on the road between these two places. According to informants, World Vision has built girls’ dormitories for the secondary school in Bongo.

Catholic Relief Services, Cord-aid and World vision also set up health programmes, including nutrition, birth control and hygiene instruction. Every now and then, the health clinic in Kunkua is crowded with women and young children, waiting for vaccinations. In order to stimulate the women to make their way to the clinic, food (oil, wheat and corn-porridge) is handed out. A similar strategy is applied by development organisations in order to encourage girls' education. Primary school girls and their parents receive "US Aid" tins with oil and bags with wheat, if the girls have attended school a minimum amount of days.

Thereby, the community of Kunkua is linked up with Cecik (The Centre for Cosmvision and Indigenous Knowledge), through Dr. David Millar who brought me in contact with the village. Both Cecik and its funding organisation Compas have an approach based on the principle of endogenous development, which refers to "development embedded in the indigenous knowledge, spirituality and astrology of the people". Cecik's programme includes rejuvenation of religious shrines and grooves, training in gender awareness, livestock maintenance, fishing and dry season gardening and more. Cecik aims at "development from within" and does not employ full-time staff but intends to take advantage of existing development agencies and capable people based in the Kunkua-community itself.

### ***Household/ family level***

The Frafra people have a patri-lineal kinship system which means that children belong to their father's family. Sons traditionally inherit the farm. Daughters move in with their husband's family after marriage. Traditionally, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife and polygyny is still widely practiced. Yet among younger men (roughly under the age of forty) polygamy is rare. Partly, this is due to the increasing conversion to Christianity, which strongly condemns polygamy. However, the reason for "marrying only one" most informants mentioned was not religious, but economic. Men (and women) pointed at the increased material needs, which made a large family unaffordable.

Some of the households in the area are female headed. The heads could be widows but in a few cases they turned out to be young, single mothers. As some of these women explained to me, they had stayed at the farm since there were no brothers or fathers to take care of the farm and in more spiritual terms "to give water to the ancestors". Staying at the family farm automatically meant that marrying was impossible, since no man would leave his

family. The fact that they had become pregnant and were hence continuing the lineage was seen as a positive thing rather than a shame by the family members.

One farm or compound can consist of several related households. Each household generally has its own yard, cooks separately and has its own farming plot, but this may vary from compound to compound. The smallest compound, and at the same time household, I encountered was formed by one widow. Yet the Gowrie chiefs's palace for example is a compound with more than ten households.

### ***Religion***

The “traditional religion” or “paganism” as it is referred to by the local English speaking population, focuses on the earth and the land. The land, “tenga” is seen as the universal provider and sustainer of all living beings as well as the home of the ancestors. As Edward Tengan (1991: 77) put it “... experienced as the womb and the tomb, the beginning and the end of human existence, the earth embodies for these Africans the very mysterious character of life it self.” The relationship with the earth is ritualised through the establishment of different earth cults, which involve the pouring of libation (pito, flour water) and the sacrificing of animals. Soothsayers are consulted to find out what rituals should be performed. The religion involves worshipping of the ancestors, certain “small gods” as well as one overarching “supreme being” who was often identified with the Christian God or Muslim Allah.

As I described in the historical background section, Roman Catholicism has become increasingly popular since the 1970s. The largest and most prominent building in Bongo is a Roman Catholic Church and Bolgatanga has a large cathedral. Islam has been present in the North for centuries, yet Muslims form only a small minority in Kunkua, Gowrie and Bongo. In Bolga however, Muslims are more common, also due to immigrants from other parts of the North. It appeared that the traditional religion in both Bolga and the rural areas, is now mainly practiced by older or uneducated people.

Different religions are often practiced within one family or marriage. In many cases I encountered, parents practiced the traditional religion, whilst their children had converted to Christianity. Some young women had independently turned to Catholic or Charismatic churches, while older women usually followed their husbands, usually meaning that they stuck to the traditional beliefs. I also encountered some couples consisting of a Muslim and a Christian partner.

### **Chapter 3: The Fieldwork**

The data I will discuss in the chapters 4, 5 and 6 were collected during a fieldwork period between the beginning of October and the end of December 2002. During this period, I lived with the Aniah family in Kunkua, apart from a three week-stay in Bolgatanga. In this chapter, I will give an insight into the way I experienced my stay in the field as well as into decisions I had to take. Also, I will describe the composition of my research population as well as the methods I used for my data collection. Finally, I will reflect on two factors that played a role in the collection of data: the assistance of interpreters that enabled me to communicate with Frafra speakers and my own identity as a white person studying images of Whiteman's land.

#### ***Experiencing fieldwork; my stay in Kunkua***

I felt welcome in the family from the moment I arrived. The first few hours in the compound, communication was difficult since Assibi (the mother of the family) and the small children who were at home, did not speak English. Yet we smiled at each other and they offered me water and a seat in a large wooden chair. Then, when more children were coming home from school, I got the chance to find out who lived in this household and who were part of the other two households that together constitute the compound. The children gave me some guided tours and taught me my first Frafra (the local language) words. When father Richard came home, the family started sweeping and washing one of their two zinc-roofed rooms. It would be mine for the time to come. They decided to rename me Tina, just like their oldest daughter Clementina who was "schooling in Bolga". I was "Sulemia Tina" (white woman Tina) according to their last-born, toddler Lebel, who liked to sing this aloud, running around the compound.

The thing that struck me most in the beginning was how spread out the village was. Kunkua consists of farms scattered around the savannah, connected by small paths. I got to know that "our" compound was close to where Kunkua ends and Bongo, the next village, starts. Besides that, it took some time to see where Kunkua begins or ends or what could be considered a central point. The first night, the gongs were telling us that the prayers were starting at the nearby open spot. I joined Assibi and the children. A large group of mostly young people had gathered around an image of the Virgin Mary and a little choir. People

joked that today Mary herself has come to pay them a visit and I was offered a seat on the choir's bench. I listened to the songs, prayers and stories, but I could not understand their language. Although I have realised this before I started my research, frustration about not speaking, or at least understanding Frafra, would stay with me through out my fieldwork.

The first days I needed to adjust to my new environment which was very different from what I was used to in the Netherlands. The sun was killing and there was no electricity, running water or toilet, but I was amazed about the place where I had ended up. I was aware that it was just one superficial layer I was looking at and I knew it was the desire of a spoiled Westerner to live close to nature "just for a while", but at the first sight life appeared very idyllic. Animals and little children were everywhere, the sunsets and night skies were beautiful, the fields were green.

Gradually, I was able to construct an idea of the family I was living with. I found out that Richard (43) and Assibi (39) have five children. Lebel (3), Amy (7), Linda -or Baby- (11), Philip -or Kofi- (16) and Tina (21). It appeared that Assibi and Richard were also taking care of a cousin, Ambruce, whose parents lived in a compound next door. Ambruce was taking care of the pigs, but the main reason he was with the family was that he now got the chance to go to school. Richard's brother Basil (25) was also part of the family. Thereby, it was always a coming and going of different relatives and neighbours. Some of them, like Basil's agemate and neighbour Donald, were almost part of the family. He sometimes had dinner with us and sometimes even spent the night in the compound. I also found out that Richard had a second wife, Assibi's younger sister, with whom he had a little son. This woman was living with her son in a bungalow in a nearby town, where she was working as a teacher and they sometimes came by for a visit to Kunkua.

The fact that all Richard's children were attending school shows the reasonable well-to-do position of the family. Assibi earned some money by brewing and selling the local beer *pito* and Richard got some benefits from assisting in research such as mine. Although Richard does not possess cows (which is traditionally seen as a sign of wealth), his animal farm consisted of a range of animals: fowls, pigs, donkeys and goats. Thereby, the well-built house, which included the zinc-roofed rooms and the fact that the family had the disposal over bicycles and a motorbike makes that the Aniah family was regarded as one of the better-off families in Kunkua

Besides carrying out the interviews, I spent my days cycling, writing, washing and chatting with the family or other people. On a large Chinese-made bicycle I explored the area, winding

through cereal fields and along the lake. I wrote my notes or diary underneath a tree or at night next to a lantern on the yard. I washed my cloths at the well and took bucket showers next to the big rock. I tried to eat the local staple food T.Z. (a thick millet porridge) but enjoyed the home-grown rice and bito leaf soup. I *conversed* with Richard, the children or other English-speaking people, sitting on the yard. At night, we plugged or cracked groundnuts or I helped the children with their homework. I sometimes accompanied Richard on his work for the Agro-forestry project. I met his co-volunteers and talked to people in surrounding villages who came to the meetings Richard had organised. On Sundays, I often accompanied Assibi and the children to church in Bongo.

Almost every day I walked or cycled to Gowrie to do some work in the house of the English teacher Alisdair and to chat with a woman called Alice, who had a small business selling food to teachers and students. Every week or so, I cycled to Bolgatanga to get some groceries, make a phone call home, check my email or go out for a drink. Three weeks of November I spent in Bolga, for reasons that I will discuss in the following section. I stayed in a guesthouse and visited the family in Kunkua a few times.

At my return in Kunkua, it appeared that a lot had changed. It made me realise that in case of a short study like mine, the choice of period can be crucial for the findings you will go home with. It was not only the landscape that has undergone a metamorphosis (from green to barren and yellow), the atmosphere too, was different. Whilst during my first research period in Kunkua people had been busy harvesting all day, social life now seemed to flourish again. At junctions people gathered to drink pito together and every week there were some funerals and festivals. Almost every night I fell asleep to the rhythm of drums and singing somewhere on the fields. It was also just now, that all kinds of family relations and problems became clear to me as well as the socio-economical differences that existed within Kunkua. I started to see how people were related and who was befriended with whom.

Feeling more and more at home in the family meant that internal tensions could not remain hidden for me any longer. Richard often complained that everyone in the family seemed to have “his own agenda”, which made organising family based activities difficult. He mainly blamed this on the fact that they were not all practicing the same religion; Assibi and the children are Catholics while Richard has more or less returned to the traditional religion (see appendix). He also mentioned that a marriage between an educated, “enlightened” and an illiterate person, like he had with Assibi, was sometimes difficult. Thereby, the local beer *pito* appeared to play a considerable role. Like most people in the community, Richard and Assibi enjoyed to drink this kind of alcohol at the nearby junction, which sometimes affected their

behaviour and hence the atmosphere in the compound. Although the quarrels never went out of hand, they sometimes made me feel uncomfortable. Yet at the end I could discuss these problems openly with Richard and I realised that even these experiences were valuable data for my study

### ***Setting up the research: initial decisions***

The aim of my fieldwork was to get an insight into the imagination of the West in a village in a particular region, the Upper East. Since the people in Kunkua speak Frafra and only a minority that has been to school can express themselves in English, finding an interpreter was my first concern. I first informed at a nearby school and a friendly English teacher offered to help me, but of course she was only available afternoons and weekends. Later, when I sat down with my hostfather Richard to explain my plans, he assured me he would be the best person to do the job. Richard told me that he knew the community very well and that he was experienced in assisting in social and agricultural research. Initially, I was a bit cautious to accept his offer. Would he have enough time to do this next to his voluntary job at an agro-forestry project and the work on the farm and was he really that experienced? But Richard convinced me to at least try it and we started setting up an action plan.

Who will be my informants, who am I going to interview, was the first thing to get clear. I intended to have a very broad research population: grown-ups of different age, gender, religion, education level and socio-economical background, with or without the desire to migrate to the West. I realised that choosing such a varied group would not facilitate the drawing of very specific conclusions, but I hoped it would enable me to compare the different views in the light of the different personal characteristics and backgrounds. In order to get an insight in this background -the life the informant has lived so far and the difficulties he has had to face - the first part of every interview would consist of a life history. Triggered by some guiding questions, I hoped the informants would tell me their life histories in their own words. Initially, my aim was to limit my interviews to the community I live in. This could be Kunkua or Gowrie, the larger chieftaincy or village of which Kunkua is part. This decision I left for later. I assumed that studying one community would make it easier to get a picture of the links with the outside world, the relations between one another and the circulating stories about the west.

We decided to start close to home, the first people I interviewed were elderly people in neighbouring compounds. In my eyes it seemed a good idea to start with old, wise people so they could tell me about their view on my research question and their perception of the

changes in the community over time. Subsequently, I interviewed some of their children, most of them educated, as well as some of Richard's age mates, who are men in their early forties. I also interviewed Alice or "Quality", who I had met in Gowrie through the British volunteer Alisdair, and with whom I would later spend many afternoons talking. In Gowrie I furthermore came in contact with teachers and students in the secondary technical school and paid two long visits to Gowrie's regent, the late chief's son.

From the moment I arrived, I started asking Richard and others if they knew people in the village who had migrated to Europe or America, since I wanted to find out more about the migration process from this area to the West. Interviewing the migrant's family had my interest because I assumed that they could be important transmitters of knowledge about the West. It took a few weeks until Richard found some families with relatives in the West that we could go to. They did not live far away, ten or fifteen minutes on the motorbike, but they lived in Bongo...

At this point it was already clear to me that the idea of studying one village, one community, by interviewing its members and mapping the different information flows that reach the community, did not match the reality in the field. I, naively, had had in mind a quite isolated community where all people would go to the same village churches, same school, would know the same people and would tell shared village stories. Reality, however, showed a totally different picture. First there was the extensiveness of the village, with no visible borders. Secondly, movement and social interaction were not limited to Kunkua or Gowrie. Richard, for example, spent a lot of time in Bongo, where he knew a lot of people. Assibi and the children usually went to the large church in Bongo, but sometimes opted for the mass in Gowrie. People visited markets in Bolga or Bongo. Children went to different schools, in Gowrie, Bongo, Bolga or even Tamale. Confining my research to Kunkua or Gowrie now seemed unnecessary and even artificial. I therefore decided to leave my initial plan to study one community and take a larger area as research setting.

The area even became broader when I decided to spend some time in Bolgatanga, the city fifteen kilometres away. This three week-break from the village life, the last three weeks of November, had several reasons. One was very practical. The rainy season had finished and the harvesting season had begun, which meant that everyone was very busy working on the fields. I had to do interviews either very early in the morning or at night when it was dark and informants were tired. At a certain point it even became difficult to find people willing to talk to me at all. They assured me that in a few weeks they would have all the time of the world for interviews. But now, their first priority was harvesting the groundnuts and millet.



Another reason why I thought going to Bolga was a good idea was that my data collection in the village was limited to the interviews. Apart from regular conversations with a few people around the house or with Alice (the woman selling banku in Gowrie), I seldom talked to people about my topic spontaneously. My inability to speak the local language as well as the spread-out nature of the village made it difficult to interact with people, outside the family, in an informal way. In Bolgatanga, I hoped to collect unsolicited accounts about the way the West is imagined by just chatting with people I would meet on the streets. Besides that, I thought it would be interesting to see if images about the West and ideas about migration were different in a city, where there is more access to mass media and where migration to the West may be more common.

In Bolga I interviewed a varied group of people. A business woman who liked to visit Europe just for business, a man who had tried everything to get a visa to earn some money in Europe, several young Muslims who had tried to reach Europe over land via Libya but who failed. A re-migrant, who lived in Germany and Holland and whose dream was to go back there one day, mothers of migrants, the chief and the locally famous singer Sambo, whose lyrics were relevant for my topic. Besides that, I had countless random conversations with people on the streets, in drinking spots and on the yard of my guesthouse.

I continued interviewing different people in Kunkua, Gowrie and Bongo. On my request, Richard and I visited and interviewed the people that were, according to Richard, the poorest in the village. They turned out to be mostly single mothers, widows and widowers. I left Kunkua just before Christmas 2002. Apart from a chicken, beans and straw hats for my parents the villagers had given me, the most valuable things to take home were my two notebooks and a diary. In the following section I will give an overview of the methods I used to collect this ethnographic material and the people who eventually comprised my research population.

### ***The Research Population***

In the above section I have made clear that my informants formed a varied and broad group, living at different locations. In my data presentation I will consequently mention the place of residence, age and education level of an informant. I think it is useful to give a brief overview of my research population.

I carried out 30 interviews in Kunkua/Gowrie, 16 in Bongo and 16 in Bolgatanga, which adds up to a total amount of 62 interviews. Among these, there was a group-interview

with 8 young Kunkuan females (uneducated, aged 20-25), a class-discussion I organised with students (m/f, aged 15-22) at the secondary school in Gowrie as well as a group-discussion I had with 8 volunteers (educated, m/f) at the agro-forestry project in Bongo.

Roughly 20 % of all my informants was older than 55. Nobody in this group had been to school. In the group between 18 and 55, around 50 % was younger than 35. In the rural area (Kunkua, Gowrie and Bongo) I spoke to both illiterate and educated young (under 55) people. In Bolgatanga all young (under 55) informants were literate.

In the rural areas I spoke to both “traditionalists” and Christians (predominantly Roman Catholics) and 1 Muslim. In Bolgatanga, the research population had a different composition. 7 out of 16 informants were Muslim, the rest were all Christians. The “traditionalists” I interviewed in Gowrie, Kunkua and Bongo were mostly male, elderly or both. In other words, I did encounter only a few young women who said to practice the traditional belief.

As I mentioned earlier, I deliberately searched for families with relatives living outside Africa. This eventually resulted in 13 interviews with people with relatives living in Europe, United States or Cuba. Other “extra-ordinary” informants that need to be mentioned are the regent of Gowrie, a Roman Catholic priest of the Bongo Parish, The chief of Bolgatanga and the Chief Imam of Bolgatanga. Another specific group consisted of 3 Muslim young men from Bolgatanga who had lived and worked in Libya for at least a year. Since Libya is often seen as a steppingstone to Europe I was interested to examine their ideas about the West.

### ***How to catch an image: methods and techniques used:***

I have paid attention to the phenomenon of *imagination* and *images* in theory, but I have not yet made clear which specific sort of images I have in mind for this study. In the following section, I will look at this question,

Images of “the Other” or an “elsewhere” (in my case “the West”) can have different forms and are produced in different ways. Said’s study on images of the Orient for example, was based on the images produced by scholars and artists in academic texts, paintings and literature (Said 1978). Several studies on the imagination of the West derive the images under study from advertisements, television programmes or modes of self-fashioning (Carrier ed. 1995; Weiss 2002). The images I wanted to study however, were images people themselves construct, their *mental representations* of the West (Nyamnjoh et al. 2002), though they can be influenced by images circulating in society, produced by media, education or advertising or

other sources. I gained an insight in these mental representations mainly by eliciting descriptions during interviews.

Obviously, people also expressed these mental representations in situations different from my interviews or conversations. Therefore, looking at art or folklore was also relevant. I gathered some traditional songs, a poem and some contemporary lyrics that showed some aspects of the way Sulemitenga was imagined in the area. Yet, as Nyamnjoh stresses, it is important when using circulating images as data to always pay attention to *by whom* certain images were produced. For example, advertisement and media images circulating in the area were not produced by the people I studied and could therefore not be seen as expressions of their ideas of Sulemitenga.

This does not mean that they were not interesting for my research, they were, but only as *influences* on construction of the Frafra images, not as data about how my informants imagined Sulemitenga. The same can be said of images derived from sermons in the church. They are interesting because they affect people's ideas. Yet they do not have to be representative for what people in the community believe, because the priest is often in a different position from the people. He is better educated and has often even traveled to the West.

So concluding I can say that my research consisted of the investigation of both the images of the West the Frafra constructed (and revealed through spoken language, songs or poems) and the images of the West as they circulated through society. The latter were in general not constructed by my informants but by other Ghanaians or Westerners and they were influential on the way my informants imagined the West. They could be television programmes, pictures on old newspapers that were being used as wrapping paper, church sermons, school books and... Obviously, in reality this division between Frafra images and the circulating images (originating from elsewhere) is not as clear and the two kinds of images often overlap. The "circulating" images influence the Frafra images and can eventually even take their place.

### ***Interviews***

In the theoretical chapter I made clear that the perception (or imagination) of the own situation and the imagination of the West are dialectically related. So in order to understand the construction of images of Sulemitenga, I had to investigate the self-images of my informants and vice versa. Therefore, the interviews consisted of different parts. Firstly there was a small introductory part in which I asked the informant's name, age, ethnic group,

religion, marital status and property. I also tried to get an insight into the composition of the household and the number of family members working in the South or abroad. Secondly, I asked people to tell me their life-stories, since this method is considered a good method to gain an insight in the self-image of informants (Nijhof 2000). I hoped to elicit accounts in which informants, in their own words, reflected on their situation and the things that had happened in their lives. The aim of third part was predominantly to find out how Sulemitenga was imagined.

With regard to the second part, it appeared that most informants were not very elaborate in their life-stories. They often described their lives in a few sentences while leaving out in my eyes essential events. I sometimes tried to lead them gradually through their lives by asking guiding questions, but I was cautious to do this because it could harm my aim to grasp the informant's perspective on his life, expressed in a certain discourse. It also appeared that people did not reflect much on their lives in the life histories. My questions about their feelings towards things that had happened or what they considered important events in their lives, hardly ever evoked clear answers. Alice, my friend from Gowrie (f, 42, educated, originally from Navrongo), once gave an explanation for this: Alice:

*“These questions are difficult for us, because of poverty, we have no choice, (repeats). We run away and do things unintended before we come and realise. If your parents are not serious, you can't go to primary school unless you struggle. If you drop out, you go and marry by force, because you can't get to eat. No choice for you!”*

This answer not only gives a short version of Alice's own past, she also points out that most people do not reflect much on the way their life has taken, because things just happen to them without having much choice.

Nevertheless, it turned out that people certainly had a perception of their own situation, yet they often did not reveal this until the third part of the interviews. Descriptions of Sulemitenga were almost always given in combination with descriptions of how they characterised their own circumstances. So apparently, talking about Sulemitenga was an easier way to reflect on the own situation than through life-histories.

For the interviews (the third part), I made a list of themes I wanted to touch upon. The questions had an open character because I wanted to give my informants as much freedom as possible to come up with things that they thought are important in the context of the conversation. For sure, this made me collect a lot of data that I will not directly use to answer my research question, something that was in my eyes inevitable. In the course of the research

however, when I started to see a pattern in the responses, I was able to focus more on certain aspects and to give more direction to the interviews.

The diversity of the research group also meant that I did not ask everyone the same things. Naturally, in interviews with older people I focused more on the past and their children, while interviews with young people also handled about their future plans and dreams. The several interviews I had with people with relatives abroad obviously had a different content. I asked in particular about what the informants thought and knew of the life of their relative abroad and how the contact was maintained. In the case of the young men who had actually tried to reach Europe themselves, I focused on how they came to this decision, how they had brought this into practice and why they had failed.

The lengths of the interviews ranged between twenty minutes and two hours. Initially I recorded all interviews on tape and wrote them out in notebooks afterwards. Later, when I came to realise how time-consuming this was, I started to only write out literally the English-spoken interviews. Of the translated interviews I made notes which I worked out afterwards, since in my opinion, the exact phrasing could not be caught in text anyway, because it had been translated already.

### ***Translation***

As mentioned above, Richard was my interpreter in Kunkua and Bongo. At the beginning I had made clear to him that I was not looking for right answers but that I wanted to hear everything, no matter how ridiculous it might be in his own eyes. I was happy with the way we worked together. Although he inevitably had to explain and clarify answers to me because of my lack of knowledge of the culture, he was able to present this information separately from the translations. I encouraged him to tell me how exactly he translated my answers in order to make them understandable for the informants. I understood that he needed to describe things, because different languages have different concepts with different meanings and it was good for me to get some insight in the way he did this.

Still, it worried me when his translations of my questions became long stories. I realised that Richard sometimes “helped” the informants by giving examples of possible answers. Since this was absolutely contrary to my intention to steer the responses as little as possible, I explained my difficulties with this way of translating. Richard however, argued that this was often unavoidable since my questions were so broad and general that the respondent did not know what to think of. The compromise was that I would ask more specific questions and that he would be less suggestive. So for example a question such as

“What are the main differences between your place and Sulemitenga?” I now divided in different parts. A question about the way it looks, one about the way people treat each other and one about the level of prosperity.

Obviously, it was sometimes hard for me to know or sense what could be asked and what was taboo or too embarrassing for the informants. I was hesitating to ask questions about cattle property or income, about infertility or family relations or conflicts, about the money migrated family members may send or why the children do not go to school. It appeared that when Richard is translating, it was easier for me to deal with this lack of cultural knowledge. He assured me that I could ask everything I wanted to know. He would either phrase it in a way that would make the question acceptable or he would tell me that the question was too personal. The latter only happened once, at a moment when I did least expect it. During the life-history part, I asked one of the young guys from next-door how he had met his newly wed wife from Accra. It is possible that Richard knew more about this topic already; he anyway told me that this question was too “delicate”

Richard was not only my host father and interpreter; he was also my gatekeeper. Because of the large role he played in my research, I think it is important to provide an insight into his background. Therefore, in appendix 1 to this chapter I have tried to give some insight into his life and ideas. Richard accompanied me to almost every interview in Kunkua and Bongo, introduced me and explained my visit to the house. As he said several times, just walking in as a stranger for an interview would be impossible. People needed to be sure about my good intentions before they would release their true information. When we visited some families in Bongo that he did not know personally, he approached them through a mutual acquaintance or neighbour.

I certainly had the feeling that Richard was a respected and well-known member of the community, who opened many doors for me and made that people took me seriously. But of course, his strong ties with the community -he was born and raised in Kunkua- also had its disadvantages for my research. Most of the people we interviewed he knew well. It is possible that this influenced the answers given, for example about migration plans, something that is often kept as a secret. During interviews I had with close relatives or close friends of Richard's who spoke English, Richard was deliberately leaving us alone. He explained this by saying that people he knew so well may hesitate to speak out openly in his presence. On the other hand, most informants seemed to be at ease with Richard, which caused a very relaxed and open atmosphere.

One interview we did in Kunkua explicitly showed the effect of Richard's presence on the responses. It was a single mother we talked to, who used to be Richard's girlfriend and with whom he has two children. Her answers to my questions about the poverty she was facing and the future of her children were directed towards Richard instead of me. The woman was clearly taking advantage of the situation by blaming him for not helping her out, though in a funny, ironic way. Still, Richards kept translating and in this way I got to know a lot about her view on her own situation, because of the reaction that Richard's presence evoked.

During my time in Bolga I got help from someone else: John. John was a man in his twenties who I got to know through a British VSO volunteer. He was living in a small house near the Chief's palace and was a trader in straw baskets. John introduced me to several of his family members, among whom the Bolga Chief and brought me in touch with the "Libya boys". I needed his help as a Frafra interpreter a few times, but this was not very successful. It made me realise how lucky I was to have found Richard as an interpreter. I found it often hard to understand John's English, which meant that I missed out on a lot of what the informants told me. And additional information John wanted to give me during interviews often got mixed up with his translations.

*A white woman in the field: some reflections on the effect of my own identity on the data collection*

After having reflected on the role the interpreters played in my research and the ways this influenced the outcomes, it is now time to move on to an even more significant factor in my fieldwork, namely the factor of my own presence and more specifically my white appearance in the field. What effects did I notice and how did I deal with them?

Reflexivity has become a significant feature of social research. It stands for an awareness of the fact that the researcher is part of the social world he studies and that the effect of his or her identity on the data cannot and should not be eliminated (Hammersley et al.1983: 17). By identity I mean certain characteristics such as gender, age, ethnic group or personal background as well as “ascribed characteristics”. These latter characteristics do not necessarily have to be true, but are attributed to the researcher by the people under study.

As Johannes Fabian (1983; 1991) argued, it is the confrontation and communication between researcher and the people under study that produces information. Ethnographies are hence about relations between cultures and societies. Leaving out the role of the researcher in the field, in an effort to be “objective”, is therefore a falsification of data. In Fabian’s eyes, inter-subjectivity, whereby the interaction between researcher and informant is described, would come nearest to objective knowledge production.

I agree that in social research in general, it is important to be aware of the ways a researcher can influence the informants and the data they produce. In any way, these effects should be monitored as much as possible. In some cases they should be minimized and in other cases they should be exploited, by taking advantage of the data that spring from the confrontation between researcher and informant.

In the case of my specific research, I think paying attention to the influence of my (ethnic) identity on the data is particularly important, looking at the topic of my study. My data were collected in a situation whereby I, a white European, asked Ghanaians about their ideas about whiteman’s land, my obvious own place of origin! Although other aspects of my identity such as my gender and age, must have been influential to my data and experiences to some degree, there is no doubt that my “whiteness”, was by far the most crucial feature.

Before starting my fieldwork I was concerned that my European background would be a barrier to get information about migration plans and migrated relatives, due to suspicions by informants about my intentions. Since some European consulates in Accra have started to



work with “detectives” who are sent out into the country to check details of visa-applicators, I feared that I would be seen as one of them or that I would in some way be associated with Western migration officials. I tried to limit this effect by making clear if needed, that I was an independent student, that I would change names and that I did not condemn the “looking for greener pastures”. To my surprise, most people were very trusting and did not hesitate to tell me about illegal migration adventures or plans. Yet there was one clear exception to this impression; an elder from Bolga, who had two sons in the West, turned out to be very reserved in his utterances. He did not only remain ignorant only about the work or study his sons abroad were doing, but also about his memories or knowledge about slavery and British colonisation. After the interview Richard told me that the old man had repeatedly warned him that I could be a spy: a spy of the white men one should stay away from

But as I touched upon in Chapter 1, my Western identity and Dutch nationality did affect the collection of information about migration plans. Although I did try to formulate it as neutrally as possible, getting to know if people seriously considered migration to the West was difficult. Almost all informants said that that they would like to go and that they had been thinking about it before. However, it was hard to assess in how far this was a way to keep all possibilities open (my question could be an invitation?) or that it did reflect the real situation.

Furthermore, with regard to the descriptions and valuations of the West I gathered, it is possible that the fact that I am a Westerner made the informants opt for a more positive discourse in order not to insult me or, again, to keep migration opportunities open. I cannot assess in how far this has affected my results, yet fortunately findings with regard to this topic by others are comforting. Francis Nyamnjoh and Ben Page (2002) carried out research on the mental representations Cameroonians have of whiteness and white people and they struggled with the same problem. They did a test by comparing the discussion groups with a white and a black moderator and concluded that the presence of the white one did not form a barrier to free expression (Nyamnjoh et al. 2002: 610).

Being white did not only mean that people saw me as a possible link to the West, it also meant that certain characteristics were ascribed to me. Although there was no agreement about the question if all westerners were rich (see Chapter 4), Westerners were certainly associated with relief and help (see Chapter 5). Although I was hardly ever directly asked for financial assistance, I sometimes got the impression that my background made informants emphasise the difficulties and poverty in their lives, because they hoped that I could help them.

The above shows that assessing the effects of my whiteness on the data is quite speculative. Although I think it is important that I have shown awareness that it may have affected the data, I cannot say in what ways exactly. Monitoring the effects and hence benefiting from a reflexive attitude turned out to be more easily said than done. Therefore, I cannot deny that in some ways my own identity may have obscured the data collection.

Yet on the other hand, being a representative of the West also had its advantages. People started talking spontaneously to me about the West or their migration plans or asked me about my country and thereby revealed how they imagined the West. Besides that, the “ascribed characteristics” which I mentioned above could also function as a source of information about their ideas about the West and Westerners. These characteristics could be concerned with my financial situation, my physical condition or my technical skills. People assumed for example that I had a lot of modern technical know-how but that I was not able to carry out any traditional labour that required some physical exertion.

In the next chapters, I will present and analyse the findings of my fieldwork research I described in this chapter. In Chapter 4, I will first paint a picture of the ways in which the West is imagined. I will discuss how I operationalised the term “the West” and what geographical meaning informants attached to it. I will demonstrate how people visualised the West or Whiteman’s land and what associations they had with this imaginary category. Building upon the theoretical framework as I set it out in Chapter 1, I will discuss in the subsequent chapters what factors influence the images. In Chapter 5, I will look at the role of history (in particular the periods of contact with the West) in the understanding of current images. In Chapter 6, I will discuss how the current context of my informants, including certain forms of contact with the West, shapes the imagination.

### ***Appendix 1. Life history Richard Aniah Adongo***

Around 1960, Richard was born in the house in Kunkua where he still lives. He was born in the clan of the first settlers in the area, which traditionally has the responsibility for the religious grooves and the sacrificing<sup>11</sup>. After primary and secondary school, Richard went to the Polytechnic School to be trained as an electrician, during this time he also started to go to (the Catholic) church, “because it was the trend to do that”, as he now says. Subsequently, Richard worked for a while in the Western Region (in Southwest Ghana) in wood processing. Yet his parents were old and they needed help to do the sacrificing and to raise Richard’s brother Basil who was still small. So Richard returned to Kunkua.

Soon after that, Richard married his first wife Assibi, who was a few years younger than him and belonged to the large chief’s family in Gowrie. They got their first daughter, Clementina, in the early eighties. After Richard’s parents died, they also got the responsibility for Basil, who was around five years old. In 1986, around the time when their second child Kofi (officially Philip) was born, Richard left Kunkua to spend half a year in the Soviet Union, in what is now called Uzbekistan. It was the time of president Rawling’s socialist regime (PNDC) (Skalnik 1992) and Richard, who was already working as a youth leader in Bolga, was selected to get leadership training in the U.S.S.R.

The training he followed together with a group of fellow Africans consisted of courses in Marxist philosophy, the historical development of Marxism and Political Economy. Richard told me several times how influential this period had been on his way of looking at the world, how it had “opened up his mind”. It had made him believe in development and it had taught him not to care about material things too much.

Since then, Richard has not been employed formally. The socialist principles were soon abandoned by the government and work for electricians in the region remained scarce. Since around 1987, Richard’s main activity apart from farming is his voluntary job at the Bongo Agro-Forestry Project. This project, which is connected to the Catholic Diocese has the goal of promoting sustainable land-use in the district. As an extension worker, Richard travels to different corners of the Bongo district to organize informative meetings for the farmers. He gets a small financial compensation and the use of a motorbike in exchange. Besides this, Richard has been involved in several initiatives to develop the Kunkua community and mobilise groups such as women or youth, some more successful than others.

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<sup>11</sup> This means this clan provides the earth priest, the so-called *tendaana*. The position of Chief was installed by the British, next to the *tendaana*.

His prominent role in the community, his fluent English and the network of contacts he has acquired through his development work, have resulted in the involvement in research activities carried out in the region. Like in my own case, students and scholars who aim to study the region are often directed to Richard. It means some work for him in the form of giving advice, assisting in the research or working as a Frafra interpreter.

After Kofi, Richard and Assibi got the three youngest children, each time with around four years in between. Around five years ago, Richard married a second wife: Assibi's younger sister. According to Richard, this was Assibi's idea<sup>12</sup>; her sister was training to be a teacher and needed financial assistance. Marrying Richard would give her some financial security. Richard and his second wife have a son: five year-old Moi. Moi and his mother live in teacher's bungalow somewhere in Bongo district. Richards goes there to visit or his wife comes to his place.

More than once, Richard reflected on his own life and current position during the many talks we had. Marrying young had meant that he could not continue his education by going to university because he had to feed a family. He told me that several of his friends had become important people, with good jobs and incomes, living in nice houses and driving cars. Richard realised that he had the same capacities but that he had made different choices in life. Richard: "They say God has a plan for everyone". Subsequently, Richard always emphasised that he did not mind the way his life had taken, that he was happy with what he did now. That his friends had told him that community development "on the ground" was an important job too. He explained to me that the simple life he was leading fit his principles. "I like village life because I don't care about material things. It is quiet and you don't see people in expensive clothes and things... things that you then may want too".

I wondered why he came up with this issue of "his life compared to that of his successful friends" so frequently. Although it was a matter that seemed to bother him especially after he had some calabashes of pito, for sure it was something important to him. Was it a way of justifying his way of life to me and a way of telling me that if things would have happened differently, he could have gone to university like me? Or was he looking for an affirmation, because he was not always that sure if he had made the right choices?

Richard is not going to church anymore; he said he turned away from it because he could not approve of what some people in church were doing. The fact that he married a second wife was also a source of conflict with the church. Assibi and the children however,

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<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, I have not checked this with Assibi. See

are active Catholic Church members, Kofi is a mass servant, Assibi takes part in several societies. Richard initially returned to the traditional religion, which includes pouring libation and sacrificing millet and animals to the small gods and the ancestors. Yet, he stopped doing this a few years ago, when Assibi and the children started a “revolution” in the Aniah family. As Kofi and Clementina told me, this revolution meant that from then on they refused to assist Richard with or eat from religious sacrifices, because they did not want to honour the “small gods”.

Richard said he did not mind much about giving up these religious traditions, which you can only perform with the whole family, since he did not care much about religions in general. He was rather negative about Assibi’s active role in the church. According to him, church did educate illiterates “only half”. They made them come to meetings and fund money, without making them think for themselves. He also blamed the church for Assibi’s changed, materialistic mentality. Although he also described Assibi as a hardworking woman, according to him she wanted new dresses all the time, to show off at the church meetings<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Although I planned an interview with Assibi about these topic several times, I never managed to sit down with her and an interpreter.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Images of the West; Common Images and Individual Fantasies**

The question to make clear now, is what images the people I interviewed had of the West. The words *images* and *the West* are the main components of this question. In the preceding chapters on theory and methodology, I have explained how *images* should be understood as mental representations that were made explicit mainly during interviews. The meaning of the term *the West* however, still needs some elaboration. Because it is the meaning that the people under study attach to it which is most relevant, this elaboration will be based predominantly on empirical data from the field.

#### **§ 4.1. The meaning of “the West”/Sulemitenga**

The first step to understand how the West is imagined by my informants is to determine the meaning and location of the term “the West” in their eyes. The term is a category with which a part of the world is represented and it is important to determine what it covered from their point of view, instead of imposing my own category on my informants.

Therefore, I will now make clear how I operationalised the term in the field and which parts of the globe the informants actually had in mind. I realise that the meaning of the term “the West” is somewhat vague. The same as Said writes about the Orient (1978: 4) can be said of the West: it is not an inert fact of nature, it is not merely there, but it is essentially a man-made geographical entity. And according to Fernando Coronil (1996) “the West”, just like “the Occident”, “the First World” and “the Third World” are terms that are used in both everyday speech and scholarly works to classify and identify areas of the world. Coronil (1996: 52): “Although it is not always clear to what these terms refer, they are used as if there existed a distinct external reality to which they corresponded, or at least they have the effect of creating such an illusion.”

In my eyes, the West would include Europe, North America and Australia as well as some other countries, selected on grounds of economical position and appearance of the majority of its population rather than geographical location on the world map. To me, the West also means the non-poor, non-Third World part of the world. It is interesting to see that I too, can only define or locate the West by taking out essences and negating other things. This

is in line with Carrier's (1995) and Said's (1978) idea that dialectical definition is an inevitable human tendency that is universal.

Yet my aim was to find how my *informants* imagined the West, so it was up to them to locate and define the meaning of the West. I discovered that the best Frafra translation of the term was the word "Sulemitenga", meaning Whiteman's land. It was the word my interpreter Richard used to refer to the West in interviews and I soon started to use it in English spoken interviews as well. In this way I could make sure that all informants were talking about the same term.

From the interviews it became clear that the term "Sulemitenga" was indeed fluid and had different geographical meanings. The "distinct external reality" (Coronil 1996: 52) it referred to, was not clearly bounded. It obviously meant the place where the white people lived, but locating that place was difficult. To some informants, mostly the uneducated, it was just everything outside Ghana meaning roughly "far away worlds". They were not able to mention places in Sulemitenga or they would come up with names like London or America, but with African countries and towns in Burkina Faso as well. *Africa* was also regularly mentioned as a place in Sulemitenga. A lack of geographical education, which made that people have no acquaintance with world maps or globes, can probably account for these -from my point of view- incoherent responses. The fact that these people could not define Sulemitenga by its "location on the map" made the boundaries of their category even more blurred.

The reaction of an elderly man I interviewed, father of two migrated sons, made very clear to me how he saw Sulemitenga as one single place. He insisted that one son had joined his older brother and they were now living together in Sulemitenga. Nevertheless, other members of the family had told me that they had one brother living in the U.S. and one in Britain. Obviously, it was the father's interpretation of Sulemitenga as one place that caused his idea of his sons now living together. Sulemitenga as the home of the whites (Sulemias) who speak Sulemia (English).

Educated people were able to distinguish between different places. America, London, Britain and Germany were often mentioned. Japan too, was definitely seen as part of the country of the whites. The presence of Japanese volunteers in the region must have contributed to this. Interestingly, many people mentioned Cuba, Russia and China. This is not surprising considering the fact that in the past (when Ghana's government had close ties with foreign communist regimes) several people from the area were sent there to study through scholarships. No distinction was seen between the level of prosperity in these former socialist

countries and Europe or America. Initially I was cautious to pay a lot of attention to the stories about these, in my eyes, non-western countries and tried to make clear that that was not where I was interested in. Eventually however, I realised that this was not a sensible effort. If in the eyes of my informants the term Sulemitenga also covered these countries, their accounts or experiences of these countries were just as useful.

Asking to mention country names appeared not the best or only method to determine what Sulemitenga meant to the informants, especially not with regard to the people who had not had any formal education. Therefore, utterances about TV programmes which informants regarded as being *from* Sulemitenga, also helped me to understand what the term covered. It turned out that despite Sulemitenga's literal translation as Whiteman's land the term was applied in a broader sense. The Cosby Show (a sit-com featuring black Americans) for instance, was regularly mentioned as a programme from Sulemitenga. People explained to me that the streets, the houses and the way people talked in this series, demonstrated that the programme was about Sulemitenga, despite the non-white appearance of its characters.

#### **§ 4.2 The content of the images**

Above I described what the *emic*<sup>14</sup> conception of Sulemitenga was for different people. I will now look at the content of the images of Sulemitenga. It is the first part of my research question: "What do images of the West look like in Northeast Ghana?"

In Chapter 1 (Theory) I have argued that the individual situation of an informant determines what essences he chooses to describe the West, although there is a broader economical, political and cultural context as well, that explains certain patterns and parallels between individual images. This means that images can differ from person to person whilst there are also common elements. However, these theoretical premises confront me with a problem with regard to the presentation and analysis of data. On the one hand, presenting my data only in the form of a generalised picture would ignore the variety of the images and would make an analysis based on personal background impossible. Yet on the other hand, summing up all different descriptions informants gave and relating them to their personal situation and history, would give a very unorganised result. Besides that, only focussing on the individual would overlook the shared context of my informants.

Therefore, the best way to present my data is a mixture of these two cases. In the first place I will picture some very common images as they were described by almost all

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<sup>14</sup> From the informant's point of view



informants or by large groups among them, and I will try to make clear why so many people (or a particular group) came up with them. In addition, I will make clear what I mean by “personalised images of the West” by presenting some personal cases. With these cases I hope to demonstrate how characteristics can be attributed to the West according to personal circumstances.

### ***“High buildings and good roads”. Visualisations of Sulemitenga***

My own, initially rather narrow, interpretation of the meaning of *images* was reflected in the way I tried to elicit descriptions of how my informants imagined the West. I asked them how they thought Sulemitenga *looked*. I wanted them to express their visualisation of Sulemitenga. Many people hesitated by saying that since they had never been there, they could not tell. A few said that they never thought about it because they could never go there. In such cases I made clear that I was just interested in how they *thought* it looked and if more encouragement was needed I suggested that they might remember stories about the West or pictures they had seen on television or in newspapers. It then appeared that everyone had some kind of image or idea about Sulemitenga in mind.

The responses from different people to this question appeared to be quite similar and they made me initially assume that images of the West were fairly collective and superficial. Almost everyone talked about the high buildings, the good roads and nice cars. The cool climate was also regularly mentioned. The descriptions often included a positive valuation of the way the West was visualised.

- Jacob, a twenty-five year-old carpenter from Bongo, who had a brother living in Sulemitenga: *“It looks more beautiful (repeats). Everything there is very, very expensive, the nature of the roads, the vehicles they are using.”*
- Isaac, an eighteen-year old from Kunkua, going to school in Bolga: *“The place is very cool, it’s nice, their living too, is very, very good. And how they move about! There are also beautiful cars in Sulemitenga. If I see how your buildings are: they are so nice!”*
- Donald, another educated young man from the rural area explained to me: *“In Sulemitenga, you only see trees and cars in a line. Not crops and trees all over like here.”*

Uneducated people described Sulemitenga in similar ways, whereby it appeared that older uneducated people especially emphasised the nature of the houses:

- An elderly man in Kunkua (uneducated): *“The roads and buildings are not the same, they are fine. That place is better, the weather is cool.”*
- Adabre (m, uneducated, 70, Kunkua, Isaac’s father): *“It’s their place, so whites are there. Their houses are better than in Bolga, they have bungalows and beautiful storey buildings. There are no poor, it is better than here.”*
- Adabre’s wife Alezzina (f, uneducated, 55, Kunkua) told me what she remembered from TV images: *“The houses were fine, they were roofed with iron roofing sheets. They looked like houses in Bongo. Fine, fine houses.”*

Sometimes details were added that emphasised the comfort of the West and the discomfort of their own circumstances. A woman (40, uneducated, Kunkua) told me on one of the dusty days during the Harmattan: *“When the cows are moving in Sulemitenga, there is no dust.”* And when people talked about the cool weather in Sulemitenga, they stressed the heat in their own region: *“In Sulemitenga, the weather is cool. Here, it can be hot. At night, you can’t sleep.”*

I think that the above answers are not surprising and that they confirm the idea of Occidentalisms as dialectical essentialisations (Carrier 1995). I asked how Sulemitenga looked and logically people described the elements that they remembered from pictures, TV-images or stories, which were in contrast to their own world. The heat and the bad roads in the area can be a nuisance for my informants and images of coldness and paved, smooth roads naturally appeal to their imagination. High buildings, bungalows and nice cars are also rare elements in their own environment and are therefore mentioned. It is possible that informants had also seen images or heard stories of the West, which showed bumpy roads or hot weather, old cars or houses. Yet probably this did not sink into the consciousness to the same extent, because it was not as different to what they were used to.

***“In Sulemitenga, things are there”. Associations with Sulemitenga***

In order to move away from these descriptions of how Sulemitenga “looked”, I searched for other ways to find out how Sulemitenga was *imagined* in a broader sense of the word. The visualisations of Sulemitenga had mainly resulted in descriptions of houses, roads, cars and a comfortable climate, yet now I wanted to move beyond these mainly infra-structural matters.

Determining what associations people had with the term felt like a good method. The question what the first thing was that came up in their mind when I said Sulemitenga, therefore became one of the integral parts of the interviews. It appeared that this resulted in some interesting answers:

- Asana (m 40, uneducated, Kunkua): *“It is fine, because they get enough food to eat, enough clothing. There are no problems because money is there and they look healthy.”*
- Agana (widow, ca 60, uneducated, Kunkua): *“What I heard is fine. They have a lot of food.”*
- Akawire (m, 44, uneducated, Kunkua): *“That place is sweet, it is good. Because there is money, everything is there.”*
- Alice (40, educated, Gowrie): *“In Sulemitenga, jobs are there. Can we find work here?”*
  
- Abdullah (m, 40, uneducated, two brothers in Sulemitenga, Bongo): *“It’s fine. We also want to be there (...) Fine means that everything is there and the people there are living fine. So if I can get there, I would like to go.”*
- Robert (m, educated, 35, Kunkua): *“Looking at those who come here and those on telly. To me they look just OK. Not just in terms of finance, it looks like they have no problems like us. The problems that black men have are a ... lack of resources, lack of education, lack of good environment. Look at the weather here!”*
- Donald (m, 25, educated, Kunkua): *“Life over there is somehow better than here. Because, Ghana for instance, almost 80-90 of us still do hand to mouth farming. In the first world, 90 percent will be under government sector, receiving salary. Looking at this modern world now, it is money with which you can do a lot with. Even though you can produce food, you need money to solve other problems. So life there is better than here.”*

In these data, I can see a certain pattern that runs through categories of people of different age, gender and education. It appeared that the difficulties of the own situation are projected on the imaginary Sulemitenga. At this point, these difficulties were not yet expressed into detail, but rather as quite general “problems” that were mainly seen as due to a lack of money. Generally said, Sulemitenga was imagined as a place where there is money, so problems can be solved. Sulemitenga stands for a place where food, schools, jobs and comfortable weather are

abundant whilst the scarcity of these things is seen as characteristic for the own circumstances. Consequently, people say to value life in Sulemitenga as “better than here”.

Uneducated people hereby referred to concrete things and circumstances that were lacking in their direct environment. The responses of educated people however, were more elaborate. As Robert’s and Donald’s utterances illustrate, they looked at the differences between their own place and Sulemitenga through a broader perspective, whereby they paid attention to the underlying causes. They imagined Sulemitenga not just as a place where money and food is abundant, but talked about the resources, social infrastructure and about an economy that is based on paid workers instead of subsistence farmers. Their own place was pictured as lacking certain economic structures and resources that make that in Europe “things are there”.

***“Now we need so many things!” Images of Self and Others in the light of modernisation.***

The need for (more) money or the “demand for things” was often brought up as a recent phenomenon that was part of the modern time. Especially men emphasised that today it was a lot more difficult “to provide for your wife(s) and children” than it had been in the past. They argued that this was not a matter of decreasing income, but of increasing demands.

Abongo (m, 25, educated, Kunkua) explicitly used the adjective *modern*, to describe the present situation: *“Looking at this modern world now, it is money that you can do a lot of things with. Even though you can produce food, you need money to solve problems.”* Others referred more implicitly to a process that is generally described as modernisation, monetarisation or an increasing integration in the global capitalist system. Asana (m, 43, uneducated, Kunkua): *“A major change in the community is that now people think that money is more important. In the past, even if someone had money he did not build a better house. Now they do.”* And Awana (f, 60, uneducated, Kunkua) said: *“In the past, when I was young, we were not poor, there was enough harvest and we could satisfy all, not like today. Today, the children want nice clothing, they need to go to school. The demand is there.”*

Peter’s case will further illustrate this idea. Peter is a forty-four year-old man living in Kunkua at a stone’s throw from the house where I stayed. Peter married four wives and has many children. He has a farm, works for the fishery department and is a co-volunteer in the agro-forestry project Richard is working for. His job, large family and house make that he is certainly regarded as one of more affluent people in the community. Yet as he explained to me in the interview, he too, had difficulties to take care of all his wives and children, because “in this time they need so many things!”

Peter:

*“In the past, you could send your child to school or not, nobody would force you. In that time, when you farmed a little, you got food, you didn’t need a lot of things.. But this time, you have to roof with zinc, they need cement for their floors, they need to spray, they need lights, bowls, wallets. So many things! When I married those things were not there, you didn’t need a lot of clothing, just food... (..) All my children are attending school. Three are in secondary school, one is in junior secondary school. The other ones are in Primary school. So with pens, exercise books, dresses, every week they have to buy a bar of soap, footwear and petty, petty things.”*

Although these ideas were based on a somewhat nostalgic picture of the past, it is interesting to note that the self-image in which the lack of things is central, is regarded a result of a process of change in the area. They showed that informants saw their own place as becoming increasingly modern<sup>15</sup>, because of the introduction of zinc roofs, cement floors, education, and the overall monetarisation of the economy. Yet rather than the benefits of these developments, people stressed the wants they had created: demands for more money and goods that they were not able to meet..

It appears that the solution for problems which modernisation has created for people in the region is seen in Sulemitenga. Their own situation is characterised by an increasing demand for things (mainly consumption goods produced outside their own community) that cannot be met, whilst in the West “things are there”. People made clear that they felt that their society has changed in such a way that money and material goods have become more important and at the same time they stressed that they have difficulties to live up to these “modern norms”. When people described a Sulemitenga of smooth roads, storey buildings and bungalows, they often referred to the (exceptional) examples of these things in Bongo or Bolga, which means that that they did see some modern (Sulemia) aspects in their own environment too. Hence the tension that is felt in their own lives between the increasing materialist demands (due to the region’s modernisation) and the economic situation that makes the fulfilment of these demands problematic is reflected in the way Sulemitenga is imagined.

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<sup>15</sup> Inspired by Ferguson (1999) I consider and interpret modernity as “a social status implying certain institutional, infrastructural and economic conditions of life.”

***“You people have this love for each other.” Ideas about family life in Sulemitenga***

Both the characterisations of the local situation and the imagination of Sulemitenga have so far been quite general. “Poverty” and “problems” appeared central in the own situation, but what this exactly meant in daily life has not become clear yet. During my fieldwork in Kunkua, it emerged that to a large degree, daily life of my informants was determined by family relations. Focusing at the way family life in Sulemitenga was imagined therefore seemed like a good way to unravel ideas about Sulemitenga, the concrete daily problems of my informants and the way they are related.

I asked informants if they thought people in Sulemitenga treated each other in a different way, in particular in family life. It turned out that people (female/male, educated and uneducated) had very strong opinions about this topic. Expressions about love, peace and affection between relatives were central in the images they revealed to me and this appeared to run straight through all different categories. Informants hereby frequently recollected television images that according to them were representative of life in the West. Often the picture of two parents, walking and holding their child between them was described to me.

- Isaac (m, 18, Kunkua, schooling in Bolga): *“It is very different there. Sometimes when you watch telly, you see them with their children on the bridge side. You see how they always play with their children. That’s their time when they are not working, when they have holidays. When you see how they move with their children. It seems they treat their children better.”*
- Rita (f, 25, uneducated, Kunkua): *“It’s difficult here, we don’t sit for long, then we have quarrels. What the women are saying, the men don’t like it, they think we are forcing them. In Sulemitenga they love each other, that’s why they move that way; husband, wife and child together. We love each other too, but we are not used to that behaviour.”*
- A man from Bongo (35, educated): *“They make sure they give birth to a number they can take care of. They treat their children with love. Here we shout at them and beat them.”*
- Awine (m, 26, uneducated, Kunkua): *“They always move together holding each other’s hands. That’s their culture. For them that’s good.”*
- Robert (m, 40, educated, Kunkua): *“All the time when I see them on telly, they are all happy, they are all happy. Whatever they are doing, they do it with joy. And when they are*

*even moving and you look at them you know they love one another. But for blacks, mmm, it is not easy to have that kind of love.”*

Especially women stressed the possibilities mothers in Sulemitenga had to take good care of their children as opposed to the difficulties mothers in their region faced.

- A woman from Gowrie (ca. 60, uneducated): *“Women here bath their children and prepare hot food, but some don’t take care of them before they go to school. In Sulemitenga they do that, I have seen it on TV”.*
- Sugya (f, 55, son in Cuba, uneducated, Gowrie): *“There it is happy, here there is poverty, so we cannot treat our children the way whites do. When we do our farming, we don’t survive with the grains, it finishes too soon. We buy from the market, but not everyone can afford the market price. The reason we cannot take care of our children here, is lack of food. You have to walk by foot to the market, sell an animal and buy grains.”*
- Some educated young men from Bongo, volunteers in Richard’s agro-forestry project told me: *“You have riches, so you have love together”*
- Lucy (f, 35, educated Bolga): *“In Sulemitenga, most of the family members look respectable. Then here, because of the poverty, we don’t have this love between us. Because of poverty, there are not so many jobs for us...Some don’t even work at all, they roam about. When you have problems, by all means, there is no love.”*
- Asana (m, Kunkua, uneducated): *“They have money, wealth, clothing, they are able to meet needs, so they won’t be annoyed with other people.*

So it appeared that this difference in family life between Sulemitenga and their own life world was predominantly seen as a result of the different levels of prosperity in the two places. As the above utterances illustrate, many informants even explicitly stated this relation between prosperity and love, poverty and quarrels. Furthermore, alcohol was seen as related to the basic condition of poverty and as an important factor in the quarrels. As Charles (m, 35, educated, Bolga) explained clearly to me:

*“Children won’t respect you if you can’t feed them. And then people turn to booze and they get even less respect from their children and wife. It causes problems. And the*

*husband, at the end of the day, he hasn't even enough for his family, he will already be angry before he gets home. Alcohol, no respect...*"

And a woman from Gowrie (60, uneducated) told me: *"Evil is our nature. People go and drink pito and then say things that are not acceptable for their husband or wife"*.

Summarising I can say that Sulemia family life was believed to be characterised by joy, love and happiness, whilst the own situation was portrayed in terms of poverty, domestic violence and alcoholism. Because I tried to find out how seriously these images (that apparently were mainly derived from television) were taken, I asked if they really thought whites did not quarrel or argue. Surprisingly, people assured me that they thought they did not, as they had never seen that happen on television or elsewhere. And if they did, the quarrels would be far less "rampant".

***"There is no place without poor". Ideas about poverty in Sulemitenga***

Although in the images described above the West is generally associated with wealth, people's utterances about the existence of poverty in the West were ambivalent. Apart from a few informants, most people thought that poverty existed in the West too. "There is no place without poor", was a frequent response. A few people said they had seen pictures on TV of whites living in bad conditions or they said they had known white people in the area who were poor. Some women in Kunkua even revealed to me that they thought I was one of the poor in Sulemitenga. Why else would I come and live with them? I was there because I was poor and in search of money, was their conclusion.

The comment "You need a job, otherwise you don't have money" made clear that Western social security systems were not prominently present in the imagination of Sulemitenga. However, the discourse on poverty in the west appeared to be rather complex: many people assured me that in Sulemitenga, you would not know if someone was poor because people would help each other more.

- Mohammed (m, 43, uneducated, Bongo, brother in Europe): *"In Europe, somebody doesn't have, but somebody else will come and give him clothes or money. But here, if you are a poor man, they will immediately know you are a poor man because here, there is nothing. In Europe things are there. They will help."*

- An older illiterate woman in Bongo: *"There is poverty in Sulemitenga, but they respect each other more. Here, when someone is poor, he is almost rejected from society. Not there."*



•An older illiterate woman (uneducated, Bongo, son in Sulemitenga:) “*God is everywhere and he will help and whites help each other more, unlike here. So there, you won’t know they are poor.*”

•Felicia (f, 22, educated, Bongo): “*There are poor, but wealthy people help them*”.

It turned out that although the informants definitely associated the West with money and prosperity, most reasoned that even there you could still be poor if you are not employed. However, the belief in respect and care for each other in the Western world and the higher general level of prosperity, made them think that Western poverty was easier to bear.

### ***Imagining going there: Sulemitenga as a migration destination***

Not surprisingly, the images of Sulemitenga as discussed above, coincided with a general desire to experience it all personally. Descriptions of Sulemitenga were often followed by utterances such as: “*I want to be there too*”, or “*If I get the chance, I will go and see that place*”. When I asked informants if they had ever considered going to Sulemitenga answers such as “*Everybody wants to go and see what’s happening there*” and (again), “*If I get the chance, I would like to go*” were common.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, I will not analyse the relation between certain images and the desire or plan to migrate to Sulemitenga. I will, however, briefly look at the ideas that exist about going to Sulemitenga, because I think it is a fundamental part of the imagination of the place. The question I will answer is what images constitute the dream of going to Sulemitenga, what opportunities and what obstacles are seen in Sulemitenga. I think that looking at the imagination of Sulemitenga from this perspective is in particular interesting because it shows if and how people see themselves take part in the imagined Sulemitenga. It extends the meaning of Sulemitenga from the home of the whites and of the décor of TV films to a possible migration destination.

Curiosity characterised this desire to go to Sulemitenga of people of different age and education level in the first place. “*I want to see it with my own eyes*”, and, “*I want to see it physically*”, were common responses to my question why the informant wanted to travel to Sulemitenga. Thereby, travelling in general was considered a better option than staying in the region, both by young people and their parents. As a young educated man from Kunkua said: “*In this world, you have to move.*” The importance that is attached to mobility (covering different forms, such as travel, migration, trade or exploration) can be seen as part of a

broader Ghanaian (Lindner 1992) as well as an “African” phenomenon. As de Bruijn et al. (2002: 1) argue, mobility in its different forms is “essential to many, even a means of survival for some, whereas in most African societies it is often a reality that is taken for granted.” It has been observed by different scholars that in Africa travel is often seen as a way to acquire manhood and training, which has evoked characterisations of African travel and migration as *a rite de passage* (Riccio 2001; de Thouars 1999).

As I discussed in the historical background chapter, migration to the Southern parts of Ghana has been the most important pattern of mobility in the Northeast of Ghana since the 1930s. The Frafras in particular are seen as a very migratory group in the North (Nabila 1975; Seidu 2001; Hart 1971). Francis Obeng (2001), who studied the relationship between climatic change and migration from Bongo District states that “migration has become the norm in the community” and that it transcends the boundaries of generation and gender. Virtually every family I interviewed had at least one member living in the South or practicing seasonal migration.

This traditional acquaintance with migration and the perception of travel as a *rite de passage* were reflected in a number of statements that “moving out into the world” is a good thing to do. An elderly woman (uneducated, Kunkua): “*It’s not good if children stay in Kunkua! How can it be good? They have to go and find something to eat, like their brothers who came and brought corn. That is better than if they stay here.*” And a woman (50, uneducated, Kunkua): “*The more you are exposed to the world, the more you get out of it.*”

The “culture of migration” (Massey et al. 1993) in the region is still mainly based on regional migration inside Ghana (Seidu 2001), which contrasts with the situation in the Ashanti and coastal areas where migration to the West has become a common phenomenon (de Thouars 1999: 29; Dam 1998). Migration to Sulemitenga does occur among the Frafra, but it usually only happens after the first step of movement to the South.

Sulemitenga was considered a good destination of migration because it was believed that in Sulemitenga, new things could be learned. As Donald (m, 25, educated, Kunkua) put it: “*Everyone has to go outside and get the knowledge and go back and give knowledge to the people. So when you go there, you learn something about their life, how they interact.*” Besides this general idea of learning new things, obtaining formal education was seen as the main reason to travel to Sulemitenga. Especially rural, older people saw “Going for studies” as the only form of migration to the West. By both illiterates and educated people, a foreign degree was valued higher than a Ghanaian one. Getting an education in Ghana was seen as a means to increase future migration chances, through a scholarship for further studies abroad.

Initially, my research idea had sprung from an interest in economic migration, whereby people leave their homeland in search for jobs and wealth. I saw this as the only form of migration when people were not forced to flee for political reasons. This emphasis on migration through education of my informants however, showed a different picture. Yet it has to be noted that in the end, economical reasons lay behind the wish to get education in Sulemitenga. When talking about the benefits of a foreign degree, informants referred to re-migrants who had a Western diploma who were now living in nice houses and were earning good money.

Despite the strong association of education with migration to Sulemitenga, especially younger informants were also well aware of the possibility of earning money in Sulemitenga. Not only was there a common feeling that in Sulemitenga, there were more jobs and there was *more* money circulating, there was also a common awareness of the unbalanced exchange rates between the Western and Ghanaian currencies. The value of the Ghanaian currency, the cedi, has decreased dramatically over the last few years, compared to the euro and the dollar<sup>16</sup>. Most informants were very well aware of this, which created images of the West as a place where millions could be earned when exchanged into cedis, as the following testimonies illustrate:

- Mma (20, uneducated, single mother and family head, Kunkua): *“In Sulemitenga you get more money, money is more valuable. It’s good there. If you go there, you get money.”*
- An illiterate woman (40, Kunkua): *“There is more valuable money, when you spend that money it is more.”*
- A man from Bongo (40, uneducated,): *“In Sulemitenga you get more money and the money is more valuable. It’s good there. If you get there, you get money.”*
- Jacob (m, 25, Bongo, educated): *“The little they get, when they bring it back to Ghana and change it into cedis, it will be plenty for them. And they will be building whatever they want.”*

There was a general agreement that a stay in the West, either for studies or work should be temporary. In the end, one should and would come back to Ghana. Despite the positive valuations of Sulemitenga, people explained it to me as a natural, human tendency to always come back to the own place of origin.

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<sup>16</sup> see <http://www.oanda.com/convert/fxhistory> for exchange rates through time

It has to be stressed that going to work in Sulemitenga was by no means seen as an easy thing to do. Informants believed that it could be difficult to find a job in Sulemitenga and that they had to work hard, but they did not consider this a disadvantage. Their eventual aim was to enjoy life in Ghana, after coming back. Therefore people did not appear to have clear ideas about their life in Sulemitenga when talking about migrating there, apart from making money and bringing it back home. “*You have to suffer to gain*”, was the common expression to justify that they were prepared to face difficulties.

Apparently, the idea that “in Sulemitenga, people help each other”, did not mean that informants believed that the whites would automatically take care of African strangers. Although I unfortunately failed to examine in more detail to whom “each other” precisely referred, I got the impression that it in the first place meant “fellow whites”. It was believed that people would not help somebody they did not know. Hence, there was a strong belief that you could not go to Sulemitenga “*unless you know someone*”.

It appeared that money and contact with residents of the West were seen as the basic prerequisites for migration to Sulemitenga, whereby the former was already considered a major obstacle. People stressed that since they often did not have enough money to travel to the South of Ghana, how could they ever make it to Sulemitenga?

The awareness that one needed some kind of paper or document in order to enter or work in Sulemitenga was well spread among my informants. Even older, illiterate people mentioned the risk of being “deported” if one lacked these papers. Informants believed that either money or an invitation from residents of Sulemitenga was a way to obtain these papers. Since the amount of money needed was in the eyes of most of my informants inconceivably high, the latter way was left as the only possibility. But people often stressed that they lacked the international networks the Southerners (in particular the Ashanti) were believed to have. Linking up with Westerners was therefore seen as the most viable means to realise the wish to travel to the West. This is in line with Nyamnjoh (2002: 612): “As European states tighten policies, quest for white facilitators intensifies.”

***A personal case:***

Probably influenced by contacts with people in regions where international migration is more common and the few migrants from the region, some people had become to consider Sulemitenga as a serious migration destination, with better opportunities to earn money than Southern-Ghana, the traditional migration destination for the Frafras. In the first place, they

looked at Sulemitenga as a place where education and jobs were available, where strong currencies could be earned and where one could hence find a way to solve the poverty at home.

Charles (35, educated) owning a timber business close to Bolgatanga's market, was one of the people I met who showed a strong desire to migrate to the West. His story and motivation give a good impression of the ways migration to the West is imagined. Charles dropped out of secondary school because his father "*lacked the knowledge about the importance of education*". When Charles's business went bankrupt in the 1996, he decided to go back to school. He studied individually and passed several subjects and hoped to combine his business with a job. Yet when Charles realised that this plan did not work out, he acquired a passport and tried to get a visa for the United States. Charles:

*"I did not know anything about the country, but I was prepared to do anything for a living. Just for a few years, because I am married and take care of the whole family. I was the first-born and my father had seven wives, so now my father has died, I have to take care of everyone, wives and siblings. Some even had to drop out of school. I made up my mind, I would have to struggle for maybe three months, then the family would receive money."*

When his visa application was rejected, Charles joined the American Green Card Lottery and tried to acquire immigration papers for the Netherlands, but both attempts failed. Now, Charles said to have accepted that it is impossible for him to reach the West. George did not consider it an option to go as an illegal immigrant: "*Because if you get deported, you lose everything.*" The fact that Charles is in a better financial position than most of my informants and that money is not the main obstacle for migration makes that he is not representative for the whole research population. Yet the way he describes going to Sulemitenga as a solution to poverty is typical for most others with migration plans.

*"If you say Sulemitenga, the first thing that comes into my mind is, it alleviates poverty. The moment you get there, you are in second heaven. But it's not the money alone. Firstly, life is safe in Europe. It's a safe place. If you get sick, you can get drugs at a reasonable price, maybe even free. Here, if you don't have money, you will die. Secondly, work is abundant, compared to the difficulties we are facing here. I am prepared to do anything. I learnt they work for hours there. So after you finish at one place, you go to the next. I can do that."*

My question to Charles if he knew TV programmes from Sulemitenga, again evoked a comparison between Sulemitenga and his own life: "*You want to live like that. But we can't.*"

*They take care of themselves. We, in bed, think of the money-problems. We struggle. In Europe, you know you will have food the next day. Here you don't. And there, if you are hard-working you can convert the money and come back... Here, even 50 dollar is a lot."*

### **§ 4.3 Is it all positive?**

The general picture that exists of Sulemitenga and Sulemias as I have described above give the impression of a predominantly positive valuation of the West and Westerners. It seems that the contrasting elements that are chosen to describe respectively the own world and Sulemitenga are not valued equally. It appears that the essences taken as characteristic for their own world are often seen as negative, whilst these chosen to characterise the West are mostly positive. In this paragraph I want to put some nuances to this impression and I want to determine if, on further consideration, it really corresponds with the data.

Negative or critical ideas were seldom expressed in my questions how Sulemitenga looked or what the informants associated with the term Sulemitenga. I therefore explicitly asked what was "not so good" in Sulemitenga. Yet it appeared that none of the uneducated people did come up with negative characterisations of the West. They simply said they had never heard of anything bad in Sulemitenga.

Some educated people however, especially the young students, were able to put some critical notes besides their overall positive image. These ideas were mostly related to ideas about a lack of hospitality in the West. Some students from the secondary school in Gowrie for example, told me in a group-interview that I organised that they had heard that in Sulemitenga if you want to stay with friends or relatives, you had to arrange it in advance and say for how long you would stay. They added to this that they were not sure if they should take this story seriously.

It was during this class-interview<sup>17</sup> that I heard ideas about racism in the West, an idea that was hardly ever expressed by other informants. These secondary school students were also the only people who distinguished between the living conditions of whites and African migrants in Sulemitenga

- "They treat you wicked, not the same, because you are a different colour, not the same blood, from a different country."
- "Their houses are not as good as the houses of the whites, because they get paid less."
- "They work hard, they clean faeces".

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<sup>17</sup> This class currently had British Science teacher, who might have supplied them with information.

Yet this did not mean that these students as a result were not eager to migrate to the West, despite their less positive images. The vast majority of the students in this class said they were still dreaming about going to Sulemitenga, either to study or work.

Because my question about what was “not so good” in Sulemitenga did not result in many interesting responses outside this specific, educated young group, I decided to phrase it differently. I started to turn the question round and ask people if “life in Ghana was good”. It turned out that the answers to this question did not only tell me something about how their own place was appreciated, but that they also revealed some less positive ideas about the West.

Informants often answered that a good thing about Ghana was the freedom. For some people this meant that “*In Ghana nobody would just come and encroach your farm, nobody worries you*”. Other people stressed the fact that they were free to move in Ghana, which they would not in the West: The common utterance “*In Ghana, you need no paper to roam about*”, implies an idea of the West where one can only acquire freedom with the right documents. Problems of illegal migrants and their fear of being deported were also known among informants but they were not mentioned as characteristics of Sulemitenga, probably because they were seen as difficulties that only existed for Africans and not for Sulemias. Many informants, especially those who knew they would never be able to make it to the West, stated that they could not be negative about their region because it was their “home”. The comment “*Wherever you are born, there is no place sweeter than home*”, was a common expression. Financial, bureaucratic and practical barriers had made these people believe that migration to Sulemitenga no real possibility for them, while they saw at the same time the benefits of travelling. I think the following responses show how people deal with these different ideas and how this resulted in a feeling of acquiescence and a more positive valuation of the own situation.

- Woman (50, uneducated): “*Where-ever you are born, there is no place sweeter than home. Ghana is good, but is also good to see how life is in different places...*”
- Abongo (m 25, educated, Kunkua), “*You know, you are here, if you are in a place you can’t say it is no good, because you have not any other place to go. So where you are now, is good. No other option to go to any other place than to stay here...But at least, as I said, if you have the chance to go somewhere, then it will help you to get more knowledge about other things*”.

- Mma (f, 20, uneducated, Kunkua single mother, taking care of her brothers): “*Ghana is a good place to live, the only problem is poverty.*”

Another side-note I want to make is that the overall positive valuation of Sulemitenga did not automatically mean that the informants considered themselves (as a people or a culture) inferior to Sulemias. It appeared that the positive valuation of Westerners and the West springs from a dichotomy of an imagined Sulemitenga of money and opportunities and the own region of poverty and problems. Various aspects of the imagination of Sulemitenga (better infrastructure, images of westerners as respectful and helpful, peaceful family life) turned out to be seen mainly as results of better economic circumstances. Sulemitenga was seen as a “first class”, privileged world, because of the opportunities that were attributed to Sulemitenga in terms of knowledge, economic mobility and international travel for its residents, rather than because of a kind of Sulemia racial or cultural superiority. I think comments that were made about the open affection between relatives in the West (such as: “that their culture, we don’t do that”, and “It is good *for them*” illustrate that a Western lifestyle is not always regarded as desirable.

So I did not get the impression of a “feeling of internalised self-hatred, that was manifested in a perverse attraction for the culture of the colonial master” as some writers argue (a.o. Nymanjoh 2000) So if we can at all speak of a perverse attraction for or fascination with Sulemitenga, I think it is not in the first place for its culture but rather for the Sulemia conditions of life. Sulemitenga’s appreciation as “a better place” did not mean that informants regarded themselves as inferior people, but as people living in a place with less opportunities and means to solve problems.

From this follows the question if this also meant that informants could also identify themselves with whites. So far I have presented the construction of images as a process whereby differences between Sulemitenga and the won place were accentuated and the “us” and “them” were constantly opposed. But is there also a feeling of unity, a “shared humanity” with regard to the Sulemias, which takes the edge off the dichotomy?

During interviews, I did not ask specific questions in order to find out if informants also identified themselves with (and not only distinguished themselves from) Westerners, but the way some informants responded to random questions demonstrated that they did. It was a way of responding whereby informants “bounced” my question back to me in the form of a rhetoric question. I will give two examples to illustrate this: When people told me they would



like to go and spend some time in Sulemitenga, I often asked them if they wanted to stay there for the rest of their lives or that they wanted to return to Ghana at some point. A common response to this question was the following: “*Now you are here, don’t you want to go back to your own place at some time?*” Another time I asked a woman from Bongo who had a son living in Sulemitenga if she was afraid that her son would change, and become like the Sulemias. Her down-to-earth reply to me: “*Are your parents afraid you become African now you are here?*”

#### **§ 4.4. Everyone his own green pasture: individual images of the West**

So far, I have looked at the images of the West as they were shared by “the Frafra people” or large groups among them. Next to these common images, I also encountered images that were only mentioned by one or two persons. Despite the fact that these individual images were exceptions, since they differed from the common images, I think they are interesting for my argument because they confirm an idea that has already emerged in the preceding pages. It will appear once more, that the images are constructed by projecting the imperfections of the own circumstances on an imaginary Sulemitenga.

In particular educated people, who were in a somewhat better financial situation than the majority of my informants, often seemed to have quite specific, personal ideas about Sulemitenga. Their position or background had made them construct images, which turned out to be quite individually determined. It appeared that personal ‘problems’, fascinations or interests were projected on the imaginary Sulemitenga.

I do not think that the tendency to produce individual fantasies about Sulemitenga is confined to educated or better-off people per se. I assume however, that since their day-to-day situation (and hence their imagination of Sulemitenga) was not determined by a struggle with poverty, they had other problems (and hence imaginary solutions) on their mind. With the help of three personal cases I will now show how personal problems or fascinations can influence the way Sulemitenga is imagined.

#### ***Richard (my interpreter in Kunkua, see life story, appendix to Chapter 3)***

*“In Europe people are happy with the little bit they have. Here people always want more.”*

When Richard made this comment, I got for the first time the idea that the imagination of Sulemitenga could possibly be related to someone’s personal ideals or frustrations. It appeared that Richard’s comment reflected his own irritation about the increasing materialist

demands in the community and family as well as his preference for simple life (see life story), rather than information that had reached him about the West

Because Richard had an active role in my research, I had never interviewed him formally about his ideas about the West, but from our conversations had gotten to know him a little. As he had told me, his studies in the former Soviet Union had made him look at the world in a way that was somewhat exceptional in the community. He said not too care much about material things and he said not to be attracted by the idea to go and earn money in the West. His preference for quiet life, close to nature and his reasonable content with his own situation in Kunkua, had made me assume that Richard did not share the dreamlike images of Sulemitenga, where life is better. The above comment however shows something different. Even for Richard, the image of Sulemitenga had the shape of a solution; he had created his own dream. It was just the fact that he had different “problems” or frustrations that made him project different solutions on it than what was common among the majority!

***Nash: “You whites are sincere”.***

I met Nash in Travellers Inn, a small café and grocery store in Bolgatanga. Nash is 38 years old and has a small wooden recording studio and cassette shop in the centre of Bolga. Nash’s case shows that specific images can go hand in hand with more common ideas about Sulemitenga. Nash’s life story shows that “going to the place where the money is”, has been the red line in his life. He spent time in Nigeria, Libya and was now hoping to make it to Europe. Another central feature his life story appeared to be his pre-occupation with “telling the truth” and ‘being honest and sincere’. It was something his stepfather, who he seemed to respect highly, had taught him and it had guided him ever since.

Nash described money and job opportunities as typical for Sulemitenga and saw these features as the main reason to go there. When I asked him if people treated each other in a different way in Sulemitenga, Nash answered that he believed that people in Sulemitenga were very sincere and honest to each other. Nash: *“What I always see in films and what is likewise the way I am myself, is the way you whites are sincere. Maybe having a girlfriend, giving all my hearts to her, all my secrets, you, you can keep it. Ghanaians can’t keep them. I observe a lot, I have seen it!”*

***Sambo: “In Sulemitenga you can be successful without people envying you”.***

Sambo (28, illiterate) is a young popular singer/musician of traditional Frafra music who has a small studio next to Bolgatanga’s market place. Several young Frafra people had made me listen to his music and I was introduced to Sambo by Nash, to talk with him about his lyrics, music and ideas. Sambo plays at events in the region as well as for the Frafra migrants in the Southern sector. Some of his songs handle about migration, home, and money.

Sambo is exemplary for a poor person “who has made it”. He grew up as an orphan in a poor family and he did hardly get any formal education. His musical talent has made that he is not “struggling with poverty” anymore but, as he made clear to me, even success could be a burden. Sambo said it was hard to deal with the envy of other people towards his artistic and financial success. The following fragment of one of his song text also touches upon this topic:

*“The world, what God has given you,  
the talent he has given you is what you have got.  
If people don’t like you, they will pretend they will like you,  
but they will spoil your name”*

Not surprisingly, Sambo’s ideas about Sulemitenga showed that he had an exceptional position in the community. Instead of stressing the wealth or employment opportunities in Sulemitenga, Sambo saw a different feature as typical for the West. He believed that in Sulemitenga, one could prosper without people saying bad things about you, which clearly reflected his personal circumstances.

#### **§ 4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter it has become clear that the imagination of the West is a process whereby elements of the West are taken out that contrast highly with the own situation. In this opposition, the circumstances in the Upper East Region were mainly described in terms of hardship, violence, poverty and discomfort, while life in the West was imagined in terms of comfort, love and prosperity. Informants applied this structure to different domains: infrastructure, family life and career opportunities. TV-images and contact with Westerners appeared to be important sources of information about the West, yet the tendency to construct images in an essentialised and dialectical way made that informants only picked certain images to become part of their imagination of Sulemitenga.

On a more individual level, this essentialised, dialectical definition whereby the West functioned as the positive pole, characterised the imagination of the West too. Hereby,

informants pictured the West in internally different, even conflicting ways, depending on the personal situation, frustrations or dreams. The West hereby seemed to be imagined as an inversion of the things they experienced as negative in their own lives.

Consequently, there was a general idea that in Sulemitenga it was “better than here”. I think these data correspond with the opinions of other scholars, who characterised African images of the West as “positive” (Lindner 1992) or “an Eldorado” (Monga 2000: 196).

## **Chapter 5: Historical origins of the images**

After this first introduction of the images, I now want to study in more detail which connections with the West are or have been influential to the images as I encountered them in the field. Firstly, in this chapter I will take a look at the history. I want to find out in how far looking at what happened in the past (more specifically the period before Ghana's Independence in 1957) can explain the images I encountered. The question to be answered is which periods of contact with the West or what specific features of the region's past are still identifiable in today's images of Sulemitenga.

I am well aware of the fact that the Atlantic slave trade and colonisation had effects on the region that can account for the region's current marginal economic position. Indirectly, these material factors also influenced current images of Sulemitenga, since they have to a great degree shaped the national and global economic systems in which my informant lived, as well as the inequality that exists between Africa and the West. In this chapter however, I focus on the psychological, discursive effects of the contact with Sulemias on the local population, rather than on its broader social, economic or political impact. This means that I will examine if and in what way the presence of white slave traders, colonisers and missionaries in the region shaped ideas and images about their place of origin.

In order to do that, I will link back to the historical background as I described in Chapter 2, but I will also come up with new historical information that will be helpful for the analysis of the imagination of the West. Apart from information derived from secondary literature, I will also make use of oral accounts I gathered. I will investigate if looking at the way my informants imagine certain events in the past, rather than the "official history", is relevant in order to understand the imagination of the West

As a point of departure I take the idea that images and stereotypes are formed through time, as it is argued in the available literature (Nyamnjoh 2002: 609; Jahoda 1961: 90; Nederveen Pieterse 1990). These scholars agree that images reflect a history and present of dealing with Western hegemony, yet on one aspect their views differ. Jahoda argues that images are, once formed, very resistant to change, while Nederveen Pieterse argues that, on the contrary, images change when circumstances change. In this chapter I hope to find out what my conclusions are with regard to this matter.

## § 5.1. The pre-independent period: the influence on today's images of slave trade and colonisation

In this discussion of the historical connections with the West, I will broadly cover the period from the Atlantic slave trade up to and including the period of British occupation of the area. When looking at Northern Ghana's history as described in the background chapter, it appears that the Atlantic slave trade and the British occupation severely affected the area. Yet at the same time, it became clear that the white men never directly raided the North and that their physical presence was only marginal during colonisation. In the following section, I will take a closer look at these periods whereby I will in particular look at the ways my informants perceive and imagine these periods in the past. I hope to find out if the local historical oral accounts are helpful for the understanding of the current imagination of Sulemitenga.

In Chapter 2 about the area's historical background, I mentioned that different kinds of slavery existed in the past. In the eighteenth century, the threat came from the South, caused by the rise of the Atlantic slave trade. Later, at the end of the nineteenth century, raiders from a Northern direction caused fear and insecurity in the Frafra area. Throughout these centuries however, a factor of threat that probably even continued into the twentieth century, was to be sold by relatives or neighbours. It is this latter kind of slavery, which did not involve raids, that was brought up by most informants when I asked them what they knew about slavery or the slave trade in the past

Everyone seemed to have heard about this kind of slavery, although accounts differed about how closely related a relative could be sold:

- Apangabasia, an older illiterate woman living in the house next door: *"You know, in the next house, they are from the same grand-father. It is possible that someone from that house would just come and sell someone from this house. But I have not seen it, they were just stories"*.
- Peter (m 43, educated, Kunkua): *"Let's take it that your father had three wives. Let's take it that my mother had two boys and the other woman had only one boy. When there is hunger, the two of us can go and kidnap the stepmother's son and go and sell. We are family, but he has a different mother. We would sell him to those who are rich, to the chiefs, those who are somehow better, who has food. To buy some food, that's why they were doing it."*
- An elder from Bongo (uneducated): *"They would catch you and sell and then buy millet and come back and maintain the family. If the father or mother were not there,*

*they would just catch you. People would be afraid of you because you could take people and sell. They would not sell their own son or daughter, but you could catch someone within the same area from a different house and go and sell. They were sent to Burkina or South...*”

This perception of slavery is changing now, due to an increasing number of people that go to school. Many younger, educated informants told me what they had learnt about the Atlantic slave trade and the involvement of whites, when I asked them what they knew about slavery in the past. Isaac, an eighteen-year-old from Kunkua, going to school in Bolgatanga, clearly distinguished between oral tradition and information he learned in school:

*“Parents tried to tell us some stories about slavery. They’ll tell us, you know, that time it was very difficult to get food to eat. So when you have five children you use one of the children and exchange it. Then you come back, collect food and feed the rest. (...) They know they were selling to the Southerners. According to books, the Southerners sold them to Europeans. But our parents did not tell us that. They haven’t seen that.”*

***“In the past, you couldn’t move.”***

Accounts from informants also show that movement of individuals was severely restricted in the past, before independence. Until around 1940, it was even impossible for people to travel freely beyond a radius of a few miles from their own settlement. This restriction must have been due to the risk to be caught and sold as a slave but also to a state of animosity between neighbouring villages and tribes, usually resulting from disputes over brides and bride wealth cattle (Cleveland 1991: 227; Fortes 1945: 10).

Apangabasia (f, 60, Kunkua, uneducated) told me about the time when she was a young girl: *“In the past when whites were here, we were not allowed to roam or move about, so even going to the market was a problem. I was a shepherd and in the evening we would all meet and bring the cattle home and stay home. Just occasionally I went to the market.”* And Peter (m 43, educated, Kunkua) said: *“In these days, you couldn’t go to Bolga unless you had someone in Zare<sup>18</sup> who could accompany you. Somebody else who is strong enough could just*

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<sup>18</sup> Zare is a village half-way between Kunkua and Bolgatanga.

*hold you and sell you out, that's why. So those days when you go, you had to carry your bow and arrow along."*

People see it as a major improvement that they are now free to move: young and old, male and female informants all saw mobility as an important factor of life. The freedom of movement between houses and markets, without being hassled, was often mentioned as a positive aspect of today's life in the region.

***Whites in the area: "In the past we would have feared you".***

Accounts of encounters with whites in the colonial past were very ambivalent and it has to be noted that they were based on childhood memories from old people. It appeared that in these times they feared all strangers, including whites. This must have been a result of the situation as described above, in which people were tied to the house. Many older people told me that if in the past when they were children, I would have entered their farm as I had just done, they would not have welcomed me like they had done now. Instead, they would have been hiding.

With respect to the emotion of *fear* that was mentioned often to describe personal encounters with whites in the past, it has to be noted that I noticed that for people in Ghana this term had a broad meaning. I noticed that informants also used the word to refer to a feeling of distance or respect. Older people complained that their children did not *fear* old people any more. Thereby, the way many Christians in Ghana describe themselves as "*God-fearing people*" also shows that the meaning of *to fear* is broader than *to be scared* and that it implies a certain emotion of awe. Therefore, I argue that even though the presence of Sulemias was often not appreciated and that their white skin scared children in particular, the white people must have had a superior appearance, from the local point of view. The weapons the colonisers carried and the possessions of both missionaries and colonisers that were until then unknown in the area, must have contributed to this idea.

Singing, dancing and drumming are important in the Frafra culture. Many traditional Frafra songs, which are still well-known among young people, handle about Sulemias in the past and show that their presence or passing by was by no means unnoticed by the local population. The following songs in particular show a fascination with the guns they carried.

**Song, sang with drums:**

"If you need to go to Bongo, you will see white people walking on the road"



**Girls' dance song:**

“ Sulemia, yes, Sulemia,  
When the gun sounds, Ayamga,  
You caused it, you didn't see. The  
White man standing, you didn't see, the  
White man standing, you didn't see him holding a gun?”

**War dance during funerals:**

“Why do you punish yourself and buy arrows  
Why should you punish yourself and buy arrows?  
Has the white man gone home?”

***A conflation of the past***

In my questions about the local history, I distinguished between two periods that appeared important to me. In the first place I asked what they had heard about the slave trade, secondly I asked them to tell stories or memories about the colonial era, “when the British were ruling the country”. Surprisingly, my informants' accounts show that in the Frafra historical memory these in my different, separate eras are seen as one. One past in which powerful outsiders possessing guns and horses invaded their area.

The response of Clemens for example, (m, 24, educated, Bongo) to my question what his parents told him about slavery, referred both to “the British” and “colonisation” and to the introduction of the gun and taking people away. “*You know when the British came and colonised Ghana, they were not handling the people the way people here like it. The whites introduced the gun, so our fathers feared them. They were taking people from their families. And whom do you ask where they have taken them?*”

And Peter's (m, 44, educated, Kunkua) answer to my question what he had heard about the time of British occupation also referred to slaves being taken away. He told me about how his ancestors were fighting with bow and arrow against the whites with guns and horses who entered their area. And: “*After that, they were only taking the young, young girls, back to the Southern sector. And men were taken as slaves.*” Albertine: “Did the whites do that during colonisation?” Peter: “*No, the Kumasi people, the Ashantis, they were now picking our girls. Not the whites but our own Ashanti people, they came with the whites!*” Accounts like this initially confused me, because they contradict the idea as is generally agreed in

literature, that the Frafras were never directly raided by white slave traders or the Ashanti (Der 1998; Saaka 2002).

Charles Piot, who studied the Kabre people in Northern Togo, signalled a similar conflation in the historical memory between these two eras. He describes how stories about the first German colonisers entering the area, blended into those about the arrival of African slave traders. Piot:

*Initially puzzled by the inconsistencies in the accounts I was getting, I came to realise that such elisions/conflations in the historical memory of Kabre made perfect sense. Not only are there striking factual similarities between the two cases-both witnessed the arrival of powerful outsiders who possessed guns and horses; both invaders were light-skinned (...) but also it is not difficult to imagine why Kabre might conceptually equate the predations of the slave trade with colonisation, and thus one predator with another (Piot 1999: 38).*

Edward Tengan (1991: 194) in his study on the Sissala in Northwest Ghana, also mentions that the first whites entering the area were confused with another, more familiar group of strangers. He hereby refers to the fact that the Sissala term *folwa*, that is commonly used for white man, identified them with the Fulani, a people from the North with whom the Sissala had contact long before the whites arrived. Tengan too suggests that this was due the light skin of both the Europeans and the Fulani.

I think similar explanations are valid for the conflation I encountered among the Frafras. Babatu and Samori must have been light skinned, on horses and in the possession of guns, just like the British. Furthermore, they were all “invaders” into the area in roughly the same period of time, which can explain that in the Frafra memory it has become “one big story”, in which Sulemias are not clearly distinguished from other, African strangers.

Yet I think there is another aspect of the particular history of the Upper East that helps to understand why my informants spoke of British and Ashanti taking their people away. During British colonisation, forms of forced labour migration existed (Thomas 1973; Cleveland 1991). As an official programme it existed only for a few years, but illegal (often Ashanti) recruiters taking people South without telling them where they were going, were active for a longer time. This forced labour and recruitment can be seen as form of slavery too and it makes understandable why Sulemias and Ashanti are associated with taking people away.

In the above I have made clear how both the past time of slave raids and the British occupation of the area were perceived by my informants. By looking at the specificities of the region's past, I have tried to explain the discrepancies between the local memories and stories and the history as it is documented in academic literature. It turned out that the time before independence is pictured as a time characterised by fear and threat, when freedom of movement was limited. Encounters with Sulemias during that time were described as frightening but at the same time awe evoking. Although whites are remembered as possessing guns and taking people away, this characterisation is not attributed to white people alone. The Ashanti people, invaders from the North as well as own neighbours or kin were seen as possible threats to the safety and freedom oneself or one's children.

The question that is relevant for my study is how this all relates to the current image of Sulemitenga. Is the positive valuation of Sulemitenga, the idea that life is better and easier over there and the positive valuation of Westerners based in the history of Western contact as presented above (either according to literature or social memory)? Or have the images that were formed during the pre-independent period totally been replaced by new ones and are images hence not as persistent as Jahoda (1961) argued?

I think the answer to this question is two-fold. Looking at the way the history is perceived, one can certainly say that next to the images as I described in the preceding chapter, there is a conceptual category of Sulemias, which differs from the images of Sulemias in the preceding chapter. A category that Jahoda (1961: 88) described as "the Europeans who were the scheming imperialists, bitter enemies of the Africans and out to bring about their downfall" and that cannot be easily matched with the images of the West and Westerners that are common today. Although these images have survived in songs and memories, it appears that the negative attitude towards the gun bearing, violent Sulemias who colonised their area is kept separate from the ways "contemporary" Sulemias in general are characterised as peaceful, loving and respectful.

On the other hand however, I see a similarity (or continuation) comparing the ways Sulemias and Sulemitenga were perceived now and then. As I discussed above, the arrival of Sulemias evoked emotions of fear, but it is not improbable this was accompanied with a certain awe. The fact that these white people had weapons which were much more powerful than the local bow and arrow and that they were able to take their land and people, must have made people envy these strangers. They had more power or at least more powerful weapons and were hence able to rule the Africans. Looking at the history in this way, a basis of a

“Sulemitenga” as a superior place as it is imagined today, can be found in the first encounter with Sulemias.

## § 5.2 The influence of the colonial discourse

So far I have looked at the colonial encounter as a material struggle for territory, whereby white invaders with powerful guns occupied the country. Yet the power of white people in the region was not only exercised by occupying land or taking people away. As others have argued (Said 1978; Nyamnjoh 2000, 2002), colonisation consists of not only a struggle for control over territory. It is also aimed at controlling meanings and minds. The appropriate tool for this is not the gun, but rather education and christianisation.

In the following section I will look at the ideas with which the British colonisers and western missionaries entered the region, how they spread these ideas and hence made people look at themselves and the own situation in European terms. Unfortunately, I have no historical material that can give me an insight into the way the Frafra people reacted to the ideas that were brought into their area. Yet the strong feeling of superiority that characterised colonial and missionary ideology, together with the influence the whites were able to exercise through education and church, make that these ideas cannot be ignored in this chapter.

*As Roman imperialism laid the foundation of modern civilization, and led the wild barbarians of these islands (Britain) along the path of progress, so in Africa today we are repaying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of the earth- the abode of barbarism and cruelty- the torch of culture and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilization...we hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonize, to trade, and to govern.*

Lord Frederic Lugard, Governor of British Nigeria (1922, in Brown 1993: 661)

Both colonisers and missionaries came to Ghana with particular ideas about Africa and its relation with the West. As the above quote illustrates, the British colonisers constructed cultural representations of the West and Africa and the differences between the two, in order to ideologically legitimate their actions. As can be derived from historical sources, the British officially formulated an objective of “clothing and feeding the poor ignorant African and leading him from the path of dark error in which he would probably ever remain, were he left to his own will and inclination. (Brown 1993; Jahoda: 1961)”

The missionaries too, came to Africa with a set of preconceived ideas about the “poor ignorant Africans” whom they wanted to rescue. As Maia Green writes:

*Certain kinds of people needed to be converted from a flawed system of beliefs to another perfect one if they were to achieve salvation. Evangelical notions of salvations encompassed not only the Non-Christian person but the society in which she or he lives. Salvation was not merely a matter of saving ‘heathen’ souls, but an endeavour in the name of civilization. Conversion was viewed as a part of global modernization, civilization away from barbarism* (Green 2003: 1).

For the missionaries as well as perhaps for some British officials, these ideas of Western superiority were not only ideological or political justifications for their presence in Africa. Their representations were also a psychological necessity, in order to survive in a socially and physically hostile environment and the Westerners almost had no choice than adhering to them. As Jahoda (1961: 92) writes: “Without supreme faith in the greater worth of what they were doing they were aiming at, they would probably not have the strength to persevere in the face of repeated discouragements.”

These ideas and images of the missionaries and British colonisers can be seen as a form of Orientalism (Said 1978); a set of images of “the non-Western Other”, that served the colonial and missionary interests and defined the global relations. Most distinct in their discourse is the evolutionist way of thinking, based on a modernist worldview whereby both space and people are imagined through temporal idioms of progress and backwardness (Pigg 1996: 163). Africa was thereby imagined as inferior place that should be guided to become like the West.

The images of Africa probably had an even more “backward” character than these of the geographic Orient, which –compared to those of Africa- were credited with “some degree of civilization” (Brown 1991) Since images of the Other are always made in opposition to images of the Self, the discourse included ideas about the own, Western world (Carrier 1995). They were Occidentalisms produced by westerners themselves, in the form of images of a ‘superior, civilised West’. A West that was pictured as far beyond Africa in terms of progress.

Through education and Christianity, Westerners were able to teach these ideas and values to the local people. Jahoda (1961: 115) writes about the African undergoing western-inspired education: “He now comes to look at Africans and African culture to some extent through the eyes of those European educators who determine the manner and content of the

teaching he received: but the price he often pays for this partially enlarged vision is psychological inferiority.”

So in a way, westerners tried to impose a negative self-image on the local people by teaching them to look at themselves and the own situation in European terms. In that way, the Africans learnt about values and characteristics that were said to be characteristic of whites and their place of origin. Jahoda:

*Schoolchildren were thus led to internalize a set of values that were in some crucial respects at variance with those to which they were exposed in their own environment; values they heard were characteristic of Europeans, and had made them as strong, wise and powerful as they were. At the same time, the children could not help being aware that these virtues were not practiced by their own families and neighbours.*

*This, naturally, was merely an indirect way of suggesting inferiority (1961: 122-123).*

I think that implicit in this suggestion of inferiority of the African people, there was an idea of Africa as an inferior *place*, as compared to Sulemitenga.

I have no reason to doubt that the British officials and missionaries who came to the Northeast of Ghana had comparable ideas or intentions to what I described above. Thereby, the entire formal education system in the region was in the hands of the White Fathers and the British government. This, as well as the church sermons, provided the westerners with a means to spread their ideas. Although in these days, only a minority of the population went to school and just a small number of the Frafras had converted to Christianity, I assume that through time, these ideas “trickled down” to larger groups of the population.

Fifty years later, is hard to judge if the white people succeeded in imposing their ideas about Western superiority on the local population and if people really “internalised” these ideas. Yet I think I can assume that in the colonial days, a basis for the idea of the West as ‘a better place’ was laid through western-style education and Christianity. It helps to understand why people choose generally positive images to characterise the West and negative features of the own situation, because that was the way the world was represented by teachers, colonial officials and priests for a long time.

I think the set of ideas the westerners tried to impose can be seen as a discourse; the colonial discourse. As has been argued by many scholars (Foucault 1980; Said 1978) the production and circulation of discourses is an integral part of the exercise of power. Because whites had colonised the area, they had power to teach what and who was good or bad and what was best for the African people. And at the same time, through the spread of their

discourse, Westerners reinforced their powerful position, and hence the awareness of inequality between Africa and the West. By unequal I mean in this case in the first place the inequality as it is perceived and felt “on the ground” by my informants, rather than the inequality as a macro-economic reality.

According to Rist (2000) and Pigg (1996), essential aspects of the colonial discourse still exist today in what is now seen as the “discourse of Development”, a “mechanism for the production and management of the third world...organizing the production of truth about the Third world” (Escobar 1988: 430). According to Gilbert Rist (2000: 47) it was during the colonial period “that a number of practices, which still persist under the cover of ‘development’ had their origin.” And as Stacy Leigh Pigg (1996: 163) writes in an article about the Nepal, “development institutions are among the most important forces brokering ideas of modernity through specific projects of modernization”.

### **§ 5.3 Conclusion**

Looking at the “colonial encounter” from these different perspectives, it turns out that the historical influences can at least be called contradictory. On the one hand there is the image of the slave raiding and colonising Sulemia as an aggressor, an image that contrasts with the current characterisations of whites as respectful, loving and peaceful. On the other hand, this same image implied an idea of successfulness and superiority of Sulemias and their place of origin.

This idea of a superior West was further reinforced during British colonisation and Christian evangelisation. Europeans had the means to spread their ideas among the local population. This colonial discourse, which was characterised by a modernist worldview in which the West was pictured as far beyond Africa, hence became part of the imagination of Sulemitenga. The current image of a superior Sulemitenga can hence be seen as reflecting a past of dealing with Western success and hegemony.

It appears that the idea of aggressive, frightening whites is not meaningful to my informants anymore, while the idea of Sulemitenga as a superior and more advanced place is still central in the imagination of Sulemitenga. Apparently, the current context of the informants still reinforces this latter idea, while their attitude towards whites has changed into a more positive one. In the next chapter I want to look at the contemporary context of the informants and the factors that determine how Sulemitenga is imagined.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Present Context: Contemporary Influences**

The preceding chapter suggested evidence that certain characteristic aspects of the way Sulemitenga is imagined today emerged in the pre-independent past. At the same time, the fact that these historical explanations were general and incomplete raised the idea that it is in the first place the more recent and current context of the informants that defines what images they construct and which old ones they adhere to. In this chapter I will examine what my informants see from and hear about the West in their immediate context and how they translate this into ideas about Sulemitenga. What messages do they take from the things, people and ideas from the West they encounter and from what they learn in school or hear in church?

The “Historical Background” and “Historical Origins” chapters showed how goods, people and ideas from outside the region have been present in the region for a long time and how these links in the course of this century gradually intensified. Fortes described how in the nineteen-thirties adventurous villagers came home with stories about “Kumasi” after travelling by foot to the South, how foreign traders passed by to sell modern commodities and how the construction of a motorway facilitated this. I stressed that Western expansion brought white people to the area and with them western ideas, education system and religion. Keith Hart’s account showed how Bolgatanga increasingly became a cosmopolitan place, which made that in the nineteen-sixties according to Hart “the modern world was on every Frafra’s doorstep”.

The last few decades, technological developments have facilitated contact with far away places. It now takes less than fifteen hours to travel to Accra, where airplanes leave to and arrive from Western countries many times a day, transporting goods and people. Migration to the South has become the norm and some families even have a members living in Sulemitenga. In Bolga, shops for national and international telephone calls have opened. Television and video cinemas show images of and stories about places around the world. Contact with the rest of the world has intensified and fastened but also moved to a larger scale: since Southern parts of Ghana are easier accessible for the Northerners, the “outside world” now mainly refers to places outside Ghana or even Africa.

For this study, the links to the West are important, since they function as the suppliers of “the pool of images” (Carrier 1995) from which people choose the images that they see fit



depending on their situation (see theory chapter). I will therefore examine what goods, people and images from the West enter the region through, markets, development organisations and television. I will also pay attention to the effect of migration to Sulemitenga: what do the ones left behind hear and how do they interpret this information. At last, in two separate sections I will discuss the influence of schools and Christian churches. I think these aspects of contemporary life in the region deserve considerable attention because they still promote ideals that people associate with Sulemitenga rather than with their own environment.

### *Flows of people*

*“With so many whites around, money will come.”*

The global flows of people that connect the Upper East Region of Ghana with Sulemitenga take place in two directions. Sulemias from different places travel to the area for work, research or a visit to friends. The Frafra people on their part travel to countries in Europe, America or former-Communist countries for study, work or adventure. In the following section, I will examine how the presence of Westerners in the region, as well as the migration of people from Ghana to the West, influences the images of Sulemitenga.

Apart from a few Europeans and Americans involved in the export of the Bolgatanga straw baskets, not many white foreigners visit the Upper East region for commercial reasons. The fact that it is not a popular tourist destination either, makes that the Sulemia community is confined to a select group: people who are in some way related to development work. Some of them stay for years in the area, others just carry out a quick assessment of Western sponsored projects. Nurses from Cuba work in the hospitals, English and Japanese volunteers teach in schools and American Peace Corps volunteers set up different projects.

The remark of one of my informants showed how, -paradoxically- white presence has only increased since Ghana's independence (Richard's uncle, Kunkua 70, uneducated): *“A main difference between then and now is that now there are more whites in the area. When I was a child, we only saw one or two. Now there are many.”* And a disc jockey living in Bolga (Bolgatanga, 38, educated, travelled to Libya) commented: *“You people always come here, we are a mixture now, because of the NGOs.”*

My impression of this “ex-pat community” did not in many ways correspond to what I had seen before in places like Accra or Nairobi. Bolgatanga and Tamale do not have large, air-conditioned supermarkets selling western foods or Western chain hotels, as the capital of Ghana or even Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city. Thereby, most Westerners live in simple teacher's bungalows or estate apartments. Only a few possess a car, others use bicycles,

motorbikes or the local trotros. But despite the fact that the lifestyles of the Sulemias did not differ extremely from some locals, their presence appeared very influential on the general ideas about a dream-like Sulemitenga. As I will demonstrate in the following paragraph, this influence is in my eyes related to the special, “charitable” role of Sulemias in this region.

*“They see some of us and feel pity, they help some of us a lot”*, was Alice’s (f, 42, educated Gowrie, originally from Navrongo) answer to my question what she thought of all the whites in the area. Her view appeared representative for many others. Some informants clearly showed how they had pinned their hopes on the Sulemias who had come to their area. Alhaji (f, Bolga, 70, originally from Bawku): *“I think things will change now the white men are plenty here, they will help. With so many whites around, money will come.”*

Some older, unschooled informants thereby even referred to the ‘white man’s time’, when, according to them, there was no hunger. Apangabasia, an older illiterate woman from Kunkua *“When I was young, I sometimes heard my parents say that when the white people were here, the world was better than when Nkrumah took over. And even now: if you are lucky to be linked up with a white it is good, even better than with our own people who are leading us”*. And a poor, elderly widower from Kunkua, living in a small hut by himself, even commented: *“It’s good over there, that’s why they help us. People came to help us and we drove them away. The centre of Kunkua would have been improved if they were still here. I thought by now the place would have been better, but it is still the same. If whites were here, it would have been developed.”*

In personal accounts, many people made mention of financial help they had received from priests or well-to-do people in the area, at a certain point in their lives. In some cases, these helpers had been white. There was one name I came across even more than once: the late Father Armand Lebel, a Canadian white priest who worked at the Bongo parish in the 1970s. A blind man I met at one of Richard’s agro-forestry meetings told me that he had been sent to a school for the blind by Father Lebel. Another informant told me that Armand Lebel had supported him in paying his school fees. Richard’s last-born son who was born on the date of his death, was named after him. Father Lebel, who was said to be born in a very rich family, appeared to be almost an icon in the area around Bongo, representing the good white man.

The life-story of John (my interpreter in Bolga) also demonstrated contacts with whites that had been beneficial to him. When he was young, a priest paid his fees because this man believed in his capacities. Years later, a German friend made it financially possible

for him to go to an “export school” in Accra. John told me that he liked to have white friends for the following reasons:

*“Really, I like white people because normally you get more good ideas from them. And it helps to live your life easy. If you are friendly with them, you are socially sure. In Ghana you normally don’t have a friend who won’t cripple you down. You have to look at priorities well. I believe if you make friends with white people, you make it better.”*

The above shows that my informants perceived of the white people in their region in the first place as aid-givers. It turned out that many had pinned their hopes for a better future on the Sulemias “who had come to help”. Thereby, it appeared that their attitude towards whites has changed. Whites were now seen as friendly and respectful, which is in contrast to how whites in the past were imagined. As Jacob (m, 20, Bongo, educated) said, this was due to the changed ways Sulemias were treating them: *“In the beginning, the whites did not look at us as human beings, but now they know we are equal people too”*. Or as Robert said (m, 35, Kunkua, educated): *“They thought we were some kind of black monkeys, now they know we are human beings.”*

I think the relationship of aid-giver and aid-receiver has important implications for the imagination of Sulemitenga. The unequal, dependent relationship with Westerners reinforces ideas about a prosperous Sulemitenga; *“They have money, why else would they come and help us?”* Also, the fact that the Frafras are predominantly confronted with Westerners in the role of aid-givers, contributes to a one-sided, positive image of Sulemias who help and respect others.

***Reverse flows, migration to the West: “Now you have come here, can we go to your place?”***

In the section on migration in the “Images” chapter, I argued that migration to Sulemitenga is not a very common phenomenon in the region I studied. Yet migration to Sulemitenga from the region does occur and this raises the question what the role is of the few migrants from the area on the imagination of Sulemitenga of the people left behind. According to Arjun Appadurai (1995: 53) “the contact with, news of and rumours about others in one’s social neighbourhood who have become inhabitants of these far way worlds”, are a major force behind the imagination. According to Babbe de Thouars (1999: 28) in her thesis on the remigration process of Ghanaians from the West, Ghanaian migrants are important messengers of the idea of a prosperous West.

In contrast to what studies on Southern parts of Ghana show (de Thouars 1999, Miesscher 1999: 63; van Dijk 2002), contacts between international migrants and their family in the Upper East Region is often irregular. Because of the fact that communication means are less well-established in the North and because migration to the South has often been the first step, contact is often maintained through relatives in the Southern sector. The trans-national networks that connect communities in Ashanti with the West through constant flows of money, goods and people, are absent (or at least much weaker) in the Upper East Region.

With regard to the information that migrants provide about Sulemitenga, some scholars have argued that they never tell the “true story”, but only reinforce existing positive ideas about the West (Dam 1998; Van Dijk 2002). As Van Dijk writes:

*Commonly a veil of disinformation is created to hide the fact that after arrival in the West, life is indeed very hard. Jobs are menial, and violence, intimidation and disrespect are the migrant's fate. Usually the fact is concealed that remitting money home results from only meagre savings, something most migrants can only hardly afford* (Van Dijk 2002: 7).

However, most recent research attests to the fact that in the South of Ghana stories about migration are changing and now include realistic accounts of the hardship encountered (Mazzucato, personal communication November 27, 2003). According to Mazzucato, this could be due to the greater numbers of migrants and the longer migratory experience of today as well as to the more difficult situation for migrants in the West, which make it difficult to conceal what happens in the West.

During my fieldwork I collected data about the kind of information families had received from migrated relatives. My results correspond with Mazzucato's findings that accounts given by migrants are not always positive, which suggests that the change Mazzucato points at can be seen as a broader, national phenomenon. It appeared that most of the relatives of migrants were well aware of the difficulties of life in Sulemitenga. Many people commented that they knew it was “*not easy for them in Sulemitenga*”, that they had to “*struggle for their survival*”, which shows that they were not only receiving success stories from Sulemitenga.

Yet I think it is not in the first place the kind of information supplied by migrants that causes that migration to the West remains extremely appealing, but rather the way information is being interpreted. As Nymnjoh and Page (2002: 632) put it, a letter written home describing

life in the West “may be written with particular representative intentions, but may equally be interpreted by the reader in a quite different way”. The circumstances people live in define their priorities and hence my informants judged the information about Sulemitenga according to their own frame of reference. It appeared that the hours one could work were regarded more important than what the job exactly involved. And with regard to the quality of housing, the number of floors of a building seemed to count heavier than the number of people per room. People proudly told me about their relative who had two or even three cleaning jobs, which was seen as a great thing, since they said that even finding one job in their own region was impossible. And although Europeans might describe the living conditions of some African migrants as bad, the idea that someone lived in a storey building was for most informants simply a sign that he had “made it”.

Yet even more influential than the migrant stories people heard, were the effects of going to Sulemitenga people saw in their own environment. (Kabki et al. 2003: 1). People who only knew people who had gone abroad for studies, referred to the skills they had learnt and the good jobs they had been able to find after returning to Ghana. Yet the strongest messages of a prosperous Sulemitenga appeared to be in the houses migrants built, the cars they brought in and the businesses they set up.

Peter (m, 40, educated, Kunkua) explained to me: *“My aunt’s son is in one of the foreign countries. He has got a lot of money. He came and built a bungalow, a very nice one, a portable one. Then people see a man and a house like that. If I go and if I can have a house like that, why wouldn’t I go”* And as Isaac (m, 18, educated, Kunkua) said: *“Because they always come home with many things, we believe they have good jobs over there.”*

As I described in Chapter 4, people in the region are well aware of the financial and bureaucratic obstacles that stop them from going to Sulemitenga and which make that they can only “lick at the window” instead of taking part in the advantages they see in Sulemitenga. Yet at the same time, they see all different kinds of white people entering their region, apparently without money or visa problems. Nyamnjoh (2000: 5) writes: “Thus, while even mediocre labour from the North usually finds it ways to the South at Western salary rates, labour from the South is both devalued and confined by stiff immigration policies in the North.” Obviously, this unequal situation was noticed by the local people too. Sometimes, people confronted me, both in small talk and interviews with the inequality between us by making remarks such as: *“You have come here, but can we go to your place?”* The fact that I had been able to travel to their place, whilst they had all kinds of barriers that stopped them

from travelling to Sulemitenga was hereby, implicitly, brought up as an unfair situation. I think this illustrates the idea or awareness of the unequal relationship between Africa and Sulemitenga and hence of the own role as the underdog in it. It shows how the image of a superior West with and its privileged inhabitants is still being reinforced in the daily life of the informants.

### *Flows of goods*

#### *“In Sulemitenga, things are there...”*

Just like the flows of people discussed above, import and export of goods link the research area with the outside world. According to Inda and Rosaldo (2002: 15), mass consumption (through flows of commodities) increasingly becomes a primary mediator in the “encounter” between peoples and cultures around the planet. However, the impact of the transportation of goods from the region *to* the West is obviously small. Apart from the straw baskets and hats, I am not aware of goods that are exported to the West. Some ideas about the preferences of whites about the colours of a basket are therefore probably the most evident effects of this on the imagination of Sulemitenga.

Yet looking at flows in the opposite direction: many goods *from* the West enter the region. These can be modern equipment sold in Bolgatanga’s shops, second-hand clothing, cars and bicycles or even things that are unavailable in the region but enter “virtually” through television and other media. As I argued in the “Images” Chapter, modern things are not automatically seen as Sulemia things, as many people are aware that they can also be manufactured in Africa or Ghana itself. Nevertheless, I could derive from the descriptions of Sulemitenga that luxury goods such as cars, televisions and radios are certainly seen as typical for life in the West. In this section I want to discuss what the role is of material goods in the imagination of Sulemitenga.

When I asked people what things in their area came from Sulemitenga, “clothing” was a common reply. It found out that they hereby referred to the second-hand clothing, sold at Bolga’s and Bongo’s markets. Especially in the rural area, this kind of clothing is what people wear in daily life, together with the bright coloured cloths for women, the traditional smocks for men and school uniforms for school-going children. I think it is not surprising that this Sulemia thing was such a common answer, since it is probably one of the few goods from the West that most can afford.

Informants were well aware of the origin of these clothing: they knew Sulemias had been wearing it but that they had now disposed of it and sent it to Ghana. Although it was never made explicit by informants, this must have played a role in the way Sulemitenga was imagined. My informants had to content themselves with “hand-me-down- or worn versions” (Nyamnjoh 2000: 5) of Sulemia clothes. In my eyes, it is not hard to imagine how this contributed to the idea of a Sulemitenga as a privileged “first-class world”, where life is easy and prosperous.

However, new western-style fashion was not the ideal of most. Especially the young women from rural areas said to prefer good quality “African cloths”<sup>19</sup>, either wrapped around or tailor made, to Western-style trousers, shirts and dresses. The main reason they gave for this was that they had to carry their babies on their backs, which required a combination of African cloths. GTP (a Ghanaian Cloth brand) was mentioned as the most desirable, high quality material. Dutch wax, an expensive type of cloth produced in Holland for the African market, was never mentioned.<sup>20</sup> The high prices of this material probably explain why the informants were not familiar with it.

I think this preference for African style clothing by many shows something important: the positive valuation of Sulemias and Sulemitenga does not automatically result in a desire to copy Sulemia life-style or fashion. As the above has made clear, if they had the choice, the women from Kunkua would prefer African clothes that they did not associate with Sulemias.

Next to the second-hand clothing from the West, there is also an influx of other, more expensive goods from outside into the region. As early as in the 1930s, migration to the South brought European garments and utensils, chairs and money to their area which were eagerly desired. Thereby, traders from Nigeria sold “foreign things” such as keys and locks (Fortes 1936; 1945). Today, radios, televisions, cars, motorbikes, electric equipment and many other luxury goods are available in the region, either new or second-hand. Things that, just like seventy years ago, the majority can only dream of. Most families, possess a radio, some have got a bicycle, but motorbikes or televisions are exceptional. The relevant question to look at now is: what is the role of these material objects, and the lack of it, in the construction of images of Sulemitenga?

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<sup>19</sup> I do not want to enter the tradition versus modernity debate as that would in my eyes only obscure my study. Yet it has to be noted that these African cloths are not local traditions in the sense that have always existed in the area. As Meyer Fortes study in the 1930s showed, these bright-coloured cloths were not introduced in the area until the last century.

<sup>20</sup> This in contrast with Lindner’s (1992) study which showed that women in the Kwawu area in Ashanti strongly desired this expensive Dutch type of cloth.

According to Milena Veenis, material objects are crucial in the imagination of other, better places. In her article ‘*Only because of the bananas...’ Western consumer goods in East Germany*’ (1994). She describes the changed place and meaning of Western material goods in East Germany before, during and after the fall of the Wall. She takes the German example to make clear the following idea:

*“Because material objects are the main ingredients with which we build, develop and express our individual and collective identities, they are the proper vehicles for collective and individual dreams and fantasies about faraway realities and futures, which may come true one day...”* (Veenis 1994: 55).

Looking at the pre-unification period in East Germany, Veenis describes how material and consumption shortages characterised daily life. The simultaneous closeness and unattainability of the western material life of bananas, make-up and toasters made people believe that the solution to all their material shortcomings was in the West. Dreams about other realities and possibilities were hence attached to unattainable, material objects. Is Veenis’ idea also applicable to the situation in Upper East Ghana?

*“In Sulemitenga, things are there.”* This utterance was central in the imagination of the West and it shows that material objects did feature in this imagination. But the kind of things that was being referred to, varied. As I found after further inquiry, some people (especially in Bolgatanga) had luxury goods such as televisions, cars and fridges in mind, whilst most others thought of more basic things such as enough food for everyone. So it appeared that indeed, images of Sulemitenga reflected material shortcomings, yet it also became clear that what was lacking in their lives, differed between people. Very poor people would refer to the food abundance in Sulemitenga, while better-off people mentioned the nice cars, televisions and computers, or international schools. This is well in line with Veenis’s idea that people have to be able to identify with an object in order to use it as a vehicle for dreams. Veenis: “In order to dream about other realities, other identities and possibilities, dreams must be attached to essentially unattainable vehicles with which people can identify at the same time”. For the rural, uneducated poor, modern, luxury things had no meaning, so they never mentioned it in their descriptions.

So although I agree with Veenis’s idea that the West functions as an imaginary solution to all material shortcomings (either in terms of basic needs or luxury goods), I think that that the imagination of Sulemitenga is not based on *material* problems alone. As I showed in the ‘Images’ chapter, powerful images exist of the way people treated each other, about love and joy in families. From this, it appears that the lack of material goods is just one



of the many things that is believed to have its solution in Sulemitenga. Emotional or social problems (which indeed are seen as a result from a lack of money) are just as strongly reflected of the imagination of the West.

### ***Flows of images: The influence of television***

After having discussed the influence of people and things entering the region from the West, I will now look at a third influence on the construction of images of Sulemitenga. I want to examine the role of images (in the meaning of pictures) as they reach the informants through the visual media, in particular television. It appeared from my data that this latter kind of mass media was very influential on the construction of images, even though only a small minority was in the position to watch television on a regular basis. This was partly due to the fact that other forms of media were even less common: newspapers or magazines were neither available in the rural area nor read by many of my informants, either in the city or the villages<sup>21</sup>. Internet access is negligible. Radio however, was common and was used for the reception of music and news. Yet the fact that none of my informants seemed to derive information about Sulemitenga from this medium made it a less relevant medium for my study.

Besides that, the impact of TV on the imagination is also due to its specific character. As an electronic audiovisual medium it can produce images in a fast tempo, which seem ready to enter the imagination. And as Lila Abu Lughod (1995: 191) writes: “TV brings a variety of vivid experiences of the non-local into the most local of all situations: the home.” Therefore, it is not surprising that many ideas about infrastructure, consumer goods and the behaviour of people in Sulemitenga were drawn from television.

Most people who did not possess a television and who had watched television only a few times in their lives, could only recollect some images of good roads, houses and happy families. Young males who watched TV on a regular basis, could often tell me more about the programmes they watched. Germany Today, the English spoken German programme about German goods, appeared to be an influential supplier of information about what modern

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<sup>21</sup> It has to be noted that the society is still predominantly illiterate and that hardly any printed media circulate. This shows that the people in my research area have gone through a different stage with regard to media than people in the Western world. While in the West mass literacy and the circulation of printed materials preceded the introduction of electronic media, it can be said that most people in my research area moved directly from a predominantly oral culture to the electronic media (see Sreberny-Mohammadi 2000). .

things are available in the West. Donald Abongo (m, 25, educated, Kunkua, went to school in Bongo where they had TV):

*“We watch theatre on Thursday, get education about HIV a, how bad drunkenness is, Ghanaian and Nigerian films. And after breakfast, there is German TV. They advertise some of their things, mobile phones. They educate people how fine it is to come in and buy. The German TV tells about the development in technology and Christianity that they bring us. And the news, Ghanaian news and also international news, that tells us to develop and about war in what and what...”*

And Clemens (m, 23, Bongo, has TV): *“I watch CNN, Afghanistan war and Germany Today about what happens on the German market. They show a lot of things, these things are very admirable. Posh cars. Even the environment they live in is very good, very hygienic.”*

The pictures of wealthy people in expensive houses which American sit-coms and soap operas provide, as well as the marketing of Western luxury goods on “Germany Today” are examples of how television can function as a propaganda channel for the good life in Sulemitenga. Thereby, I observed that international news programmes such as CNN can serve as promotion of the West as well, even if they deal with violence or otherwise problematic events in the West. This becomes understandable when looking at recent literature on globalisation and mass communication (Johnson 2001; Thompson 2000), which stresses that the message people take from television programmes can be different than its makers want to deliver, especially when TV images cross international borders. Thompson (2000: 257): “When people watch international news, for instance, they pay as much attention to the streets scenes, housing and clothing as to the commentary which accompanies the pictures from foreign lands.” This corresponds with the more general awareness (Inda et al. 2002; Thompson 2000) that transfer of TV images from one culture to another does not happen in a unilinear manner but that it entails interpretation, translation and customisation on the part of the receiving subject.

In Chapter 4 on “Images” it already appeared that indeed, only certain images produced by television are taken to become part of the imagination. Firstly, it turned out that only those things in Sulemitenga that seemed better than their own circumstances were remembered. Secondly, there was a striking emphasis on images that had reached them of happy, peaceful, family life, probably drawn from American sit-coms. I partly explained this by referring to the human tendency to think in oppositions, whereby only elements of “the

Other” were picked that contrast highly with the own situation. I think, however, that there are more reasons that cause that images are interpreted and retained so selectively.

In the first place, it has to be realised that images derived from films or comedies, were taken as serious information about the reality in the West, because no distinction was made between information and entertainment. In their perception of the images, the lines between fiction and reality were blurred. This could be due to the far (physical and imaginative) distance of my research population to the world they see images of. As Appadurai (1995: 35) argues: “...the farther away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly when assessed by criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world”.

I think the interpretation of TV images of Sulemitenga can only be understood in the broader image of Sulemitenga as I am reconstructing it in this thesis. Gradually, it is turning out that Sulemitenga as an imaginary place has a special role in the minds of the informants. It appears that, due to several unequal relations with the West whereby the own region is repeatedly the negative pole, Sulemitenga has become to function as a solution of all problems. I think TV reinforces this idea, because it is interpreted so selectively. The process of dialectical essentialisation (whereby only contrasting elements are seen) and the blurred lines between fiction and reality enable people to only pick what they want to see and hence to keep there fantasies alive.

The fact that these images of loving, peaceful and affectionate western families appealed so strongly to the imagination did not mean that my informants automatically wished to imitate this lifestyle. Many informants made this clear with remarks such as “that is their culture”, or “That is how they do it, for them that is good.” What was most meaningful for them was that they saw a world in which people enjoyed life, had enough food and clothing, were healthy and going to school. Even when they spoke of wanting to “become like you”, they were referring to the overcoming of specific problems instead of to the wish for cultural or racial resemblance. Problems that they identified as lack of food, domestic violence, alcoholism and lack of education (Ferguson 2002: 560-561).

Nevertheless, I think the emphasis that was put on certain images was not only due to their specific meaning for my informants. I think these images were also used to make something clear to me, as a message that was given to me, and perhaps to the community I was believed to represent. It seemed that descriptions of TV images of love, joy and peace

were taken as an emotional outlet, as an opportunity to tell me about their own problems. Therefore, I can interpret these images not only as mental representations but also as a way of criticising their own circumstances.

### ***Education as a contemporary influence***

In the “Images” chapter it became clear that a difference in education levels often result in different images. This is not surprising since teachers and schoolbooks transmit ideas and knowledge about Sulemitenga, just like for example television, foreign development workers and migrants. Thereby, education can change a person’s self-image and future dreams, since education is often seen as a preparation for a different life than the traditional farming.

In this section, I want to discuss how education can influence someone’s perspective on Sulemitenga and the own area. This is in particular relevant for my study, looking at the education situation in my research area. As I set out earlier, the education level in the Upper East is generally low (see Chapter 2). It can be said that there is an educated minority that can read and write (about twenty percent) (Songsore 2001) while the vast majority is illiterate. This division often runs right across families; it is no exception that one son has completed university while another has had no formal education at all.

At first sight, it seemed that educated people often had a bit more realistic or moderate image of the West than illiterates, in which there was also place for critical remarks (about for example a lack of hospitality, racism or strict visa-policies). I think this is not surprising because being able to read and to speak English gives access to all different kinds of information about the rest of the world, in school and in media. It also means that direct contact with Westerners is easier and more common. A few times, educated young people told me they had heard these less positive stories about the West from their white schoolteachers.<sup>22</sup>

Yet this more critical image often turned out to be a rather superficial layer, covering ideas about Sulemitenga that were just as, if not more, positive than those of the illiterates. I often asked an informant what came up in his or her mind when I said “Sulemitenga”. Some educated people answered that illiterates thought it was some kind of paradise but that they knew better. Later in the conversation, however, their descriptions of family life, love, wealth and job-opportunities in Sulemitenga showed a dream-like picture, similar to ones held by illiterates. This ambivalence matches Nyamnjoh and Page’s (2002) observations in

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<sup>22</sup> European teachers were employed at several secondary schools in the region through a programme by V.S.O. (Voluntary Services Overseas).

Cameroon. They write: “the dream of Europe remains fascinating ambivalent - a solution, but one the dreamer knows to be flawed” (2002: 628).

The interview I had with Robert (m, 35, Kunkua, educated) demonstrated a similar ambivalence. Robert started by telling that as a child, he had a very positive idea of the West. While elaborating on these ideas however, I got the impression that they were still meaningful to him, although he knew they were not true. Robert:

*“As a child, when you saw whites, you thought they come from a different place and that place is better than here. Because their skin is smooth and their life is just simple and gentle. So I thought that is where people must live, not here. Here it’s is hell, there it is heaven. That’s what I thought when I was a child. Now that I have matured, I know Sulemitenga is just the same, it depends on where you are and who you are. .. I found out because we have some here. I don’t know if he doesn’t have money to go back or...”  
(...) I realised that when you are in Sulemitenga and you have nothing, you can still be a poor man. If you only want to sleep and eat, not work, you will be poor. So I realised, wherever you are, you should try your best”.*

But later in the interview, Robert expressed a very positive idea about the West that showed he was still fascinated by the image of Sulemitenga as a place of solutions. The picture he painted resembled the heaven and hell metaphor he had just brought up as a childish fantasy.

*“All the time when I see them on telly, they are all happy, they are all happy. Whatever they are doing, they do it with joy. And when they are even moving and you look at them you know they love one another.”*

And:

*“I do admire the way they live their life, it is very simple. The white men on telly and those who have come here, to me they look just OK. Not just in terms of finance, but it looks like they have no problems like us the blacks here. When you see a black man, he is suffering, feeling miserable. The problems black man is a lack of resources, lack of education, lack of good environment. Look at the weather here!”*

I think that the fact that even educated people who have access to all sorts of information sources, stick to very positive ideas about the West can be explained by looking at their circumstances. I even see reasons why *especially* the educated minority would pick very positive images from the “pool of images”. Reasons that are connected to the feeling of frustration that I encountered in particular among the unemployed, educated group in the

area<sup>23</sup>. Frustration which, in my eyes, springs from a situation in which education has made people expect a paid job and a different life, while the economy is still mainly based on subsistence farming and very few jobs are available.

I encountered this frustration in many conversations. In Bongo, at Richard's Agro-forestry project, for example, I came into contact with a group of volunteers. All were younger than 35 years, all had completed at least Junior Secondary School<sup>24</sup> and none of them had a paid job. During the group discussion we had, they told me, almost in anger, about their situation. They said they had not been to school to do voluntary work and that they really wanted a job. They painted a picture of their lives in which lack of money, hunger and boredom were common, resulting in rampant quarrels. They also seemed to describe their poverty in Western terms: they could not celebrate birthdays, which was said to be all due to poverty. The image of the West they pictured was the opposite: there was riches, so there was love between people, and there were jobs so there were opportunities which they did not see in their own place.

I think this feeling of frustration is intensified by the increasing socio-economic differentiation in the area and throughout Ghana. Although in numbers it is a very small minority, it is obvious that there is a group of Ghanaians that "has made it" or has "become somebody". Shops in Bolga have opened, selling expensive electronic equipment, throughout Ghana nice bungalows and villas have arisen and well-dressed businessmen and women are seen around. Yet the people I interviewed knew one thing for sure; these successful people had made their money in either "the Southern Sector" or Sulemitenga, not in Northern Ghana

Several older people had also signalled this development and its influence on the youth. They explained to me that in the past, more or less everybody was poor, while now, some people who had earned money down South or in the West were building nice houses and driving cars. In their eyes, this made the youth long for more money and look for greener pastures.

I think it is interesting to look at this phenomenon in the light of Appadurai's writings about "the exposure to alternative possible lives" (1996), which he sees as an increasing force behind the imagination. He argues that since the last few decades, people have started to consider a wider set of possible lives, due to a growing influence of mass migration and mass

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<sup>23</sup> It is important in this light to realise in which *context* I collected the data showing frustration or discontent. This context was mostly an interview in which I asked them about their ideas about the West. So informants spoke about their own life *in reference to* their ideas about "the West", which may have stimulated "frustrated utterances".

<sup>24</sup> This means around ten years of formal schooling

media. He writes that this has made people think about opportunities, which they or their children, might have in other places than their own and makes them stop taking their own situation for granted.

I think Appadurai's ideas are for a great part applicable to the situation I encountered. It appears that the occurrence of migration in the area has brought knowledge about different lifestyles and opportunities outside Upper East Ghana and some successful migrants have functioned as proof that life is better in the West. As I showed in chapter 2 (historical background), imagination about Southern parts of Ghana is by no means new. Since the 1930s, people have travelled to that area to look for greener pastures. Yet, as Appadurai also writes, the introduction of international mass-migration has made this imagination move to a larger, international scale. Although international migration from the Upper East Region is still marginal, there certainly is a growing awareness of its occurrence.

Yet dreaming about another place is not the only consequence of these frustrated feelings. During my fieldwork, a few times the news reached me of violent disputes in the neighbourhood, which sometimes resulted in serious clashes to which the military made an end. These conflicts were generally said to be about land or chieftaincy but many argue that frustration among the youth was the root cause. Sydney Abugri wrote in "the Daily Graphic" (1-11-2003) in an open letter to Ghana's president about the situation in the North: "...social scientists won't dismiss the suggestion that a large population of unemployed and angry youth and general social discord engendered by very harsh living conditions are promoting the tragic ethnic, chieftaincy and other disputes which are worsening the plight of the majority of the people of the savannah plains".

Nyamnjoh and Page's (2002) observations help to understand the relation between imagination and frustration. According to them, both civil unrest and dreaming about another place can be seen as survival strategies in a situation of unemployment and frustration. They write (2002: 633): "In a context where youth unemployment is rife and where education has ceased to be equated with social mobility, the frustrations of Cameroonian young people are quite understandable." They paint a picture of the ordinary man who is "provoked by the sumptuous display of wealth by a few" (Nyamnjoh et al. 2002: 633) According to them, this leads to different kinds of survival strategies. They see riots (as well as prostitution, burglary etcetera) as the material strategies people take as a reaction to the frustration and the construction of positive images of the West as its imaginative counterpart. "Dreams of escape,

and fantasies articulated around the West and whiteness, are the mental equivalents of those material survival strategies”.

### **The influence of Christianity**

*“The man on whom the rubber tree fell was a black man. Other black men came and saw him suffering under the rubber tree and went their way. Even his own brother from the same father came and saw him, his clothes torn and his body full of wounds, and he too went his way. Why? Because we black men do not love each other and Christ meant to teach us to love, not only our brothers, but everyone just as we love ourselves”.*

(Fragment from a sermon in the novel “The white men of God” by Kenjo Jumbam 1980)

Christian religion is more flourishing than ever in the region, both in Catholic and so-called Charismatic churches. The turn to Christianity, away from the traditional religion by a growing group of people, was often mentioned by informants as one of the important, recent changes in the area. The weekly sermons must be very influential on the ideas and worldview of many, especially the illiterates, who have very little access to other forms of information in media and school.

I am aware that the traditional religion is still widely practiced and that there is a considerably Muslim minority in the area. Yet the fact that Sulemias introduced Christianity to Northern Ghana from the West, made me in particular focus on the role of Christianity on the images of the West. Thereby, it appeared that the “young people” (under 50) in the rural areas of Kunkua/Gowrie and Bongo as well as in the direct context of the family where I stayed, were predominantly Christian.<sup>25</sup> For these reasons I think it is justifiable to lift out the influence of Christianity in this thesis. I realise however, that a more complete treatment of the topic would require an analysis of the influence of the Islam and the traditional religion as well.

I noticed certain parallels between what informants considered typical Christian values and what they described as representative for life in Sulemitenga. Apparently, people projected what they believed to be a “civilised, Christian life” on the imaginary Sulemitenga. In particular the Christian emphasis on *love* seemed to be reflected in the imagination of Sulemitenga. Thereby, the “civilised way of life” Christianity is believed to entail (Meyer

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<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, I do not have the disposal over figures on how many people in the different districts practice each of these religions.



2003) is one of monogamy instead of polygamy, houses instead of huts and employment instead of farming, aspects that are all rather associated with Sulemitenga than with their own situation.

In Chapter 4 I demonstrated that the idea of love between people had an important place in images of Sulemitenga. That the idea of love was central in the appeal of Christianity as well became clear at different occasions during my research. When I asked informants why they had converted to Christianity or why they preferred it to their traditional religion, they often referred to the love it taught. Besides the similarity between the different beliefs, they stressed that Christianity taught love instead of envy. Hence, as a Christian you were better able to deal with people who were more successful than you, while as a traditionalist you might want to destroy that person, as Abongo (Kunkua, m, 25, educated, Christian) explained to me. An interview with Father David, the priest of Bongo, also showed an emphasis on love as a central point in Christianity, an idea that he probably passed on to the community in his sermons. Father David: *“We realised that the new religion was far better than what our people were doing. We thought it was better because it was talking about love, love, love and about the super-being, who is actually innate in we, the Africans already. So there is a similarity, but the new religion made more sense.”*

It also became clear to me that idea of a prosperous West was also explicitly reinforced in the sermons. During a Frafra service in the Bongo Catholic church I once caught the words Sulemitenga, Sulemia and London. Afterwards I asked Kofi, Richard’s sixteen-year-old son, what father David had been saying about Whiteman’s land. According to Kofi, the priest had preached about the importance of education. He had told that in Sulemitenga, one man could earn more than all the people gathered in the church earned together, which was due to their higher level of education. In this way Father David was stressing the importance and use of schooling, but it must also have had the effect of reinforcing the idea of a prosperous West. In the interview I had with father David, he stressed that he always tried to temper people’s ideas of a paradise-like West and never advised them to try their luck in Sulemitenga. Yet, as the above example shows, some of his preaches might have had an opposite effect.

The Christian church as an institution rather than the values it teaches, was also part of the construction of images of the West. Many informants made mention of an exchange programme that existed between the Bongo parish and a Catholic church in Germany. It had brought white visitors to their area and some of them had gotten the chance to go to Germany. The church was therefore mentioned as a possible way to get to the West. Often Father David

and his fellow-priest were frequently mentioned as examples of people they knew who frequently travelled to the West, because of their connections with Sulemias.

The small Pentecostal church in Gowrie of which my friend Alice had recently become a member, also had a link with Europe. People told me that it was built by a white, Pentecostal lady who had been teaching at the Gowrie Secondary School as a VSO volunteer. Pentecostalism in Ghana is known for the “international claims (Van Dijk 2002) it makes, but can not asses how far this was experiences in this way by my informants. The only sign of it I discovered was a calendar on the wall (the only decoration in the very basic, small building) showing pictures of Pentecostal communities around the world.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have pointed at several aspects in the lives of my informants that make their ideas about Sulemitenga comprehensible; the goods from the West they encounter are either worn and disposed of by Sulemias or, if they are new, unaffordable for the majority. The Sulemias who enter their area are almost all involved in development projects, which means that their relation with the locals is mainly one of aid-givers with aid-receivers. Education provides people with more information about the rest of the world, but causes at the same time feelings of frustration about the own circumstances and therefore stimulates dreaming about a better place. Churches teach to love each other and live a “civilised” modern life. Yet my informants associated these things rather with what they saw in American sit-coms than what was happening in their own lives and the attainability of this ideal was therefore associated with a particular geographical location: Sulemitenga.

The medium of television provides informants -in most cases on a very irregular basis- with images of the West. Yet these images are not as ready-to-use as they may appear at first sight. The imagination of Sulemitenga is not only determined by the kind of images people get to see, but also by the way they interpret them. A programme or image produced in the West can get a totally different message than its maker intended, when interpreted according to the standards of simple, rural life in Ghana. Some of the foreign programmes broadcast in the area can be seen as outspoken promotion for the West, but even less positive images seem to have a similar effect. It appeared that only specific aspects are selected to become part of the imagination of Sulemitenga, mainly images of modern landscapes and loving families. The information provided by migrants (the stories they tell, the letters they write home) is interpreted in similar, selective ways, which makes that even negative messages can turn into

promotion material for Sulemitenga. Thereby, people acknowledge that it is in the first place the material effect they see of migration in their own environment, that triggers dreams.

The historical image of the aggressive white men, who came to take land and people, as it developed a hundred year ago, is different from the images I just described. And that is exactly the reason why it is no longer part of the imagination of Sulemitenga and Sulemias as I encountered them in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Since these images are not being confirmed by the daily experience, they have lost their significance for the Frafra people. At the same time, the fact that the idea of a superior Sulemitenga, whose inhabitants were envied for their opportunities and power has survived up to today, becomes understandable in this light. As I demonstrated in this chapter, it is an idea that is still being reinforced in the present context of the informants.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

In the imagination of people living in the Upper East Region of Ghana, there is a place where life is considerably better and easier than where they live. That place is called Sulemitenga, meaning “the land of the whites”. For the illiterate majority, Sulemitenga has no clear geographical reality to which it corresponds and is often synonym for “faraway worlds”. According to the educated people however, Sulemitenga covers roughly what we call “the West” plus the former Communist countries like China, Cuba and Russia as well as Japan.

In the interviews I carried out to collect mental representations of Sulemitenga, some informants visualised Sulemitenga as an urban, cool and streamlined landscape of storey buildings where expensive cars move around smoothly. Others emphasised that the roads and houses are fine, even better than the nicest houses in the nearby town Bongo. Almost everyone agreed that in Sulemitenga “everything is there” because there is money to solve problems and to lead an easy life. Even if someone happens to be poor that is not a problem since whites always help each other. Since they have no problems, they treat each other with love: parents can take good care of their children, play with them and walk around, holding their child between them.

The idea that life is better in Sulemitenga can be recognised in all different kinds of images of Sulemitenga. The appeal can be in the food abundance, the well-constructed houses and in the absence of domestic quarrels. Others seem to have their own, personal fantasies about Sulemitenga about a less materialist attitude or honest character of its inhabitants, or they picture Sulemitenga as a place where envy or jealousy are non existing, which makes that people can prosper without problems.

Despite these characterisations of Sulemitenga, virtually nobody aims at moving to Sulemitenga permanently. Travelling there “to get some of their money and knowledge” is in the first place seen as a way to establish a good life in Ghana. “Seeing the world” is believed to be good for everyone, but the knowledge and money that can be found in Sulemitenga are believed to be particularly valuable. Knowledge in the form of a foreign degree is believed to guarantee a good position in Ghana. The money you bring back doubles or triples as soon as you come back and change it into cedis, so you can build a nice house and set up a business. Yet, even in Sulemitenga, you will have to “struggle before you gain”. Finding a job can be

difficult and some have to struggle for their survival. The difference is that there are opportunities, which are believed to be almost non-existing in the own region.

Yet Sulemitenga also has another face. It is associated with money and opportunities, but at the same time people are well aware of its inaccessibility and its firm borders. In the first place it is the amount of money needed to travel and to get the documents that is seen as the main barrier. Secondly, people believe you need to know someone in Sulemitenga in order to survive, contacts which the majority lacks. This makes that Sulemitenga for most remains a distant, imagined world instead of a real, concrete option for migration.

The images of Sulemitenga turn out to be a reflection, in inverted form, of the situation in which informants live. Consequently, the descriptions and visualisations of Sulemitenga I gathered do not only provide an insight in the mental representations of Whiteman's land, but also in the ways people in the Upper East Region look at their own situation, in particular the aspects they are not happy with. Sometimes explicitly, sometimes between the lines, descriptions of Sulemitenga were taken as an opportunity to criticise certain aspects of their own way of life. It appears that the quarrelling and the alcoholism within families are seen as an important negative feature of their lives. A constant struggle to meet demands is seen as the key cause for this. Unemployment is considered rule rather than exception. People who have some financial success complain about jealousy and an environment that does not allow them to prosper.

The need for money and the desire for simple, manufactured things as well as the status this brings with it are seen as the result of recent changes in the community. The Frafras see this as the result of modernisation induced from outside. They point at the education fees, clothing and shoes there are now demanded and say that in the past people only needed food and a simple house. Since most informants practice subsistence farming, they have difficulties living up to the new, modern norms. The allure of the imagined abundance in Sulemitenga becomes understandable in this light.

The kinds of material objects that feature in the imagination of Sulemitenga also show that the images mirror the context and priorities of the informants. Brands such as Mac Donald's, Coca Cola or Nike, often believed to represent the Western world around the globe (Inda et al. 2002) are absent in the imagination of Sulemitenga. It is rather food (rice beans vegetables, meat), bicycles or cars, which are imagined to be abundant in Sulemitenga. The latter goods are considered scarce and therefore seen as meaningful, while the people do not identify with the modern, Western brands. I therefore believe that material objects indeed

function as “vehicles for dreams about a faraway reality” (Veenis 1994) but that they are only part of the imagination of Sulemitenga. I argue that the allure of a Western life for the people I studied in the first place lies in the idea of the absence of “specific problems” rather than in some blind fascination for modern consumption goods. Problems that were identified as lack of food and money for clothing and school fees, the constant struggle to meet demands and the resulting quarrels, domestic violence and alcoholism.

The context that I consider central to the understanding of the construction of images of the West, also comprises connections with the West, that bring things, people, images and ideas from Sulemitenga right into the lives of my informants. The “global” (and hence the West) has increasingly become part of “the local”. It appeared that, in different manifestations, informants receive indications in their direct environment that Sulemitenga is a place of money, comfort and opportunities, where people live an alternative, easier life than they do.

In line with what Appadurai (1996) asserted, migration of community members to far away worlds as well as television programmes picturing that world, appear to be important forces behind the imagination of these alternative possible lives and hence about Sulemitenga. In the case of my study this is surprising, since among my research population television was only rarely watched and international migration was not very common. The modern Sulemitenga landscapes that were described to me as well as the happy family settings turned out to be taken from television programmes situated in the West.

The growing awareness of the occurrence of migration to Europe or America makes that dreams about making money or studying in Sulemitenga constitute a large part of the imagination of Sulemitenga. The material effect of going to Sulemitenga functions as a proof that a stay in Sulemitenga is beneficial and that it is a place where money can be earned. This material proof can be in the form of luxurious villas, mainly seen during trips South, but a new zinc roof or brick wall added to the house of a migrant’s family, can equally trigger the imagination of informants. The awareness of the extremely unbalanced exchange rates is a very important factor in the dreams about the money that can be earned in the West. Since the aim of earning money abroad is to enjoy it in Ghana, Western strong currencies are extremely appealing.

Another factor in the direct context of my informants that hints at the wealth in Sulemitenga is the constant influx of second-hand clothing from the West into the region.

People are well aware of the origin of this clothing and I think it symbolises for them the unequal relationship between the West and Africa: Sulemitenga as a place where people dispose of their still wearable clothing as opposed to their own place where this “worn and disposed of clothing” has become the common dress.

The presence of white people in the area, predominantly development workers who “have come to help” also functions as material for fantasies about Sulemitenga. It is not in the first place their appearance or belongings, as well as the implicit message that their presence carries that have the greatest impact. Their coming to the region confirms (or raises) the idea that money is abundant in Sulemitenga. Why else would they come and help? Thereby, the idea that they have come to help has resulted in a positive valuation of whites. The specific charitable role the whites in the area has made that altruistic features are attributed to them.

Negative images and stories about Sulemitenga that reach the area through television and migrants, are no deterrent for the projection of solutions on Sulemitenga. People can take a different message from a TV programme or a letter from a migrated relative, than the maker intended to give. Information is judged by standards of very simple life in the savannah zone, which makes that even critical images of Sulemitenga can turn into positive ones. My informants judged the information about Sulemitenga according to their own frame of reference, which is different from residents of the West itself. These findings confirm Nyamnjoh and Page’s (2002) findings that the development of Occidentalisms is not only limited to the production of ideas, but also related to the interpretation of texts transmitting those ideas. Interpretation is part of the process of making meaning.

Yet this does not mean that informants are blind for any critical information about Sulemitenga. Knowledge about the needed money and documents in order to enter Sulemitenga as well as the risks of being arrested and “deported” when one lacks the needed papers is well spread among the research population. It appears that the increasing awareness of the West as a “privileged first-class world” includes an awareness of the boundaries that separate them from this world, a combination that has been characterised by James Ferguson as a “contemporary African predicament”(2002: 559). However, the awareness of strict migration policies in Sulemitenga also makes people see positive sides of their own area. The fact that no documents are needed for a free life in Ghana is now seen as a positive aspect.

Despite the collective tendency to project solutions on an imaginary Sulemitenga, my data show that the descriptions of Sulemitenga are different from person to person. This is a logical result of the fact that in one society people have different problems, pre-occupations and fascinations and hence choose different aspects to become part of their imagination of Sulemitenga. An old widow, who has problems surviving with the grains, imagines Sulemitenga as a place where food is never scarce. Young women, who are annoyed by the constant drinking and quarrelling in their family, speak of a special love within Sulemia families. I think these different images can be seen as variations on the “common, underlying theme” (Carrier 1995) of Sulemitenga as a place of solutions.

Education, and hence the ability to speak English appears to be an important differentiating factor. It gives a growing number of people a broader perspective on the world and better access to information about Sulemitenga in media and through personal conversations with Sulemias. Although this had made them aware of some “flaws” in their imagined Sulemitenga, most of them continue to see Sulemitenga as a place of solutions. I argue that the situation of frustration and unemployment most of them live in can account for this. Not only are they increasingly exposed to other possible lives, the fact that they are educated makes them expect a life different from that of subsistence farmers most of them lead. Disappointment about and a very negative perspective on the own situation are reflected in dreams about a place where there are opportunities that they do not see in their direct environment. I agree with Nyamnjuh and Page’s idea (2002) that these “dreams of escape articulated around the West” are a mental survival strategy in reaction to the frustration about the own situation.

Christianity, as a religion that was introduced into the area from Sulemitenga, still plays a role in the imagination of Sulemitenga. I noticed parallels in what were seen as typical Christian values and what people attributed to life in Sulemitenga. It appears that both the idea of love and the “civilised” way of life Christianity promotes, are associated with Sulemitenga rather than with their own place by many informants. I think that Christianity, just like education and the flows of people, goods and TV images that enter the area from outside, is an important factor in the creation of awareness of alternative, possible lives.

As I anticipated in the theoretical framework, it is a human tendency to picture groups or societies other than one’s own by emphasising the differences from the own group or place (Carrier 1995; Said 1978). My data confirm this tendency of dialectical essentialisation, yet



they show that there is also an element of aspiration and longing in the way people look at Sulemitenga. However, I argue that although there is no desire for racial or cultural resemblance, informants value Sulemitenga as a better place than their own, because through their eyes, Sulemitenga is characterised by the absence of the problems they face in their life.

In an historical analysis I reconstructed how people in the region first experienced the unequal relationship of their area with Sulemitenga when at the beginning of the twentieth century white colonisers entered the area. White strangers with horses, guns and all kinds of luxurious goods entered their area and had the power to exert their authority. Next to emotions of fear and anger, this must have evoked emotions of awe or envy for the power, weapons and goods, which the local people did not possess.

During the colonial period, this idea of a superior West was further reinforced in church and school. Historical data from British officials and missionaries show a modernist worldview in which the West was pictured as far beyond Africa. Westerners were pictured as possessing values and morals the Africans should aim at. Spreading this discourse and hence imposing a feeling of inferiority through education and church was part of the effort to control and change the African population and societies. Although I have no data that give me insight in the way people in my research area dealt with these ideas at that time, I think it is important to be aware of the ideas of the people who controlled education, Christianity and administration. Everything the small but influential elite that went to school or church during colonisation learned about the West and its relation to the Africa was coloured by this evolutionist thinking.

I argue that the awareness of an unequal relationship with the West can be seen as originating in the colonial past, but that this idea has survived only because it is still being reinforced in the current context of the informants.

It appears that, just like in Edward Said's study on Orientalism (1978), the Occidentalisms I studied result from the cultural and economic dominance and power of the West. In the past, Western powers could occupy and rule the area and spread their ideas through churches and schools. Today, the powerful position of the West enables it to send out development workers, to export second-hand and new goods and to broadcast TV images to the area. At the same time, global inequality means that the vast majority of the people in the region cannot afford

the trip to Sulemitenga and that Western countries close borders and stop Africans from entering.

This thesis depicts how images of a place far away and the perspective on the own situation can emerge in relation to each other. People who live in a situation of material scarcity and who have for a long time been receiving indications that there is a place called Sulemitenga where life is better and easier, have come to look at that place as the land of solutions. This, as well as processes of modernisation in the area, has made people feel that they live in a second-class world where “things are not there”, compared to the “privileged, first-class Sulemitenga”. Therefore, this study on the images of the West from an African perspective turns out to be the record of an increasing awareness of global inequality among people in a marginalized corner of the world.

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## **Samenvatting (*Summary in Dutch*)**

Deze doctoraalscriptie behandelt de voorstellingen van het Westen (Sulemitenga) van mensen in de Upper East Region in Ghana. De scriptie bestaat uit een presentatie en analyse van data die verzameld werden door middel van interviews tijdens een veldwerkperiode in de regio van drie maanden. Zowel de inhoud van de beelden (in de betekenis van mentale representaties), als de manier waarop mensen deze beelden construeren zijn onderwerp van studie.

Als theoretisch uitgangspunt dienen de noties Occidentalisme en Orientalisme, zoals die behandeld zijn door respectievelijk James Carrier (1995) en Edward Said (1978). De kern van deze beide concepten bestaat uit het idee dat voorstellingen van mensen of plaatsen die anders zijn dan de eigen gevormd worden door de verschillen tussen de eigen en de vreemde groep of plaats te benadrukken. Welke verschillen men uitkiest, wordt bepaald door de omgeving van de beeldvormende groep en haar relatie met de verbeelde groep of plaats.

Uit de data blijkt dat de voorstellingen van het Westen overwegend positief zijn. Informanten projecteren oplossingen voor zowel collectieve als individuele problemen op het imaginaire Sulemitenga. Beschrijvingen van de voorstellingen van Sulemitenga gaan gepaard met uiteenzettingen van de problematiek in de eigen situatie; onvermogen om aan materiële behoeften te voldoen, alcoholisme en huiselijke ruzies karakteriseerden het vertoog. Materiële overdaad en een liefdevol familieleven daarentegen, staan centraal ideeën over Sulemitenga. De minder positieve ideeën over Sulemitenga blijken betrekking te hebben op het huidige restrictieve immigratiebeleid van Westerse landen. Informanten geven aan zich bewust te zijn van de risico's van uitzetting en de problematiek van leven in de illegaliteit.

Aan de hand van secundaire literatuur over de regio (o.a. Meyer Fortes 1936; 1945) en uitspraken van informanten heb ik een beeld geconstrueerd van de vormen van contact met het Westen in het verleden. Aanwezigheid van koloniale ambtenaren en missionarissen in de regio was marginaal maar niet onopgemerkt. Het belangrijkste effect van de koloniale politiek was het ontstaan van een (seizoens-) migratiestroom naar het Zuiden van Ghana, welke nog steeds bestaat.

In een hoofdstuk over de historische oorsprong van de huidige beelden komt naar voren dat de Britse bezetting van het gebied gedurende de eerste helft van de vorige eeuw de basis heeft gelegd voor het besef van een ongelijke relatie met het Westen. Zowel door de militaire triomf als door het verspreiden van een “modernistisch vertoog” via opzetten van scholen en kerken, zorgden de blanken ervoor dat het idee ontstond van het Westen als een superieure plaats.

Ik beweer dat alleen beelden die betekenisvol zijn in de huidige context overleven. In een analyse van de huidige omgeving van de informanten waarin met name de connecties met het Westen centraal staan, blijkt dat factoren als de (tweedehands) goederen, ontwikkelingswerkers en teruggekeerde migranten boodschappers zijn voor het idee van Sulemitenga als land van de mogelijkheden en oplossingen. Hoewel slechts weinig informanten toegang hebben tot televisie, blijken bepaalde TV beelden deel uit te maken van de voorstellingen. Ik ga in op de selectieve en lokaal bepaalde manier waarop zowel televisieprogramma's als migrantenverhalen worden geïnterpreteerd en deel worden gemaakt van de voorstellingen van Sulemitenga. Ook behandel ik de invloed van scholing op het denken over Sulemitenga en bespreek ik de overeenkomst tussen wat informanten beschouwen als Christelijke leefwijzen en waarden en hun ideeën over Sulemitenga.

Ik behandel Arjun Appadurai's (1995) idee dat in de huidige periode van mondialisering mensen overal ter wereld zich bewust zijn alternatieve leefstijlen en werelden en dat vooral inter-nationale migratie en televisie hierin een rol spelen. Mijn bevindingen bevestigen en illustreren dit idee maar laten ook zien dat er meer factoren dan TV en migratie van invloed zijn. Daarbij, mijn data laten niet alleen een bewustzijn van andere werelden en lifestyles (in dit geval gelegen in Sulemitenga) zien maar ook een gevoel het eigen leven hier schril bij afsteekt en dat die andere wereld en leven onbereikbaar is.

De negatieve karakterisering van eigen situatie komt met name naar voren in uitspraken gerelateerd aan ideeën over Sulemitenga. De visie op de eigen situatie is aanmerkelijk positiever wanneer niet uitgedrukt als tegenpool van het imaginaire Sulemitenga. Daarmee laat deze scriptie niet alleen zien dat de verbeelding van Sulemitenga een reflectie van de eigen situatie is, maar ook op welke wijze de waardering van de eigen situatie (en het vertoog dat hiervoor gebruikt wordt) beïnvloed wordt door vergelijkingen met het verbeelde Sulemitenga.

## Summary

This MA thesis deals with the images of the West (Sulemitenga) that exist among people in the Upper East Region in Ghana. It presents and analyses data that were collected in interviews during a three-month fieldwork period in the region. Both the content of the images (in the meaning of mental representations) and the way people construct these images, are subject of study.

The notions of Occidentalism (Carrier 1995) and Orientalism (Said 1978) constitute the theoretical point of departure. The core of these concepts consists of the idea that images of places or people other than the own are formed by emphasising the differences between the own and the alien unit. The context of the labelling group as well as the relationship it has with the imagined place or people, determines which differences are chosen to become part of the imagination.

It appears that images of the West were predominantly positive. Informants projected solutions to both collective and individual problems on the imaginary Sulemitenga. Descriptions of the images of Sulemitenga evoked accounts about the problems of the own situation: difficulties to meet material needs, alcoholism and domestic quarrels characterise the discourse. Material abundance and loving family life were central in the imagination of Sulemitenga. Less positive ideas about Sulemitenga turn out to be related to the current strict immigration policies in Western countries. Informants showed awareness of the risks of deportation and the difficulties of living as an illegal immigrant.

By looking at secondary literature (a.o. Fortes 1936; 1945) and accounts from informants, I give an idea of the different forms of contact with the West that existed in the region in the past. Presence of colonial officials and missionaries in the region was very limited, but by no means unnoticed. The most important effect of the colonial policies was the emergence of a (predominantly seasonal) migration stream to the South, which has existed up to today.

In a chapter on the historical origins of the current images of Sulemitenga it appears that the British occupation of the area during the first half of the twentieth century laid down the basis for the awareness of an unequal relationship with the West. Both the military power of the whites and the “modernist” discourse that they spread through education and Christianity caused an idea of the West as superior place.

Only images that are meaningful in the current context survive. It appears that factors such as second-hand clothing, luxurious goods and development workers that enter the region

from the West function as messengers for the idea of Sulemitenga as a land of opportunities and solutions. Even though only few informants have access to television, TV images appear to be part of the images of the West. I examine the selective and locally determined ways in which both TV programmes and migrant stories are interpreted and incorporated into the images of Sulemitenga. I also discuss the influence of education on the ideas about Sulemitenga and the similarities I encountered between what informants considered Christian values and their ideas about Sulemitenga.

I discuss Arjun's Appadurai's (1995) argument that in the current era of Globalisation people everywhere in the world are aware of alternative lives and worlds and that mainly international migration and television play a role in this. My findings confirm and illustrate this idea but they also show that, besides this awareness includes an idea that the other world is difficult to reach and that life in the own place is hard

The negative valuation of the own situation was mainly expressed in utterances that are related to ideas about Sulemitenga. It appears that the perspective on the own place was considerably more positive when expressed independently from accounts about Sulemitenga. Therefore, this thesis shows not only that the images of the West are a reflection of the own situation but also in what way the valuation of the own situation (and hence the discourse that they use to express this) is being influenced by comparisons with the imagined Sulemitenga.

