

On embodied consciousness in Anlo-Ewe worlds

A cultural phenomenology of the fetal position

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ABSTRACT ■ Anlo-Ewe generally refers to a dialect of the Ewe language spoken in southeastern Ghana, with Anlo designating an ethnolinguistic group whose homeland is on a littoral between the Keta Lagoon and the sea. Etymologically, however, Anlo derives from the Ewe term 'nlo' which means rolling up or folding into oneself. This article describes moments of ethnographic fieldwork that led to tracing links among meanings assigned to 'nlo', a migration story reinforcing the 'nlo' that was incorporated into a name, the experiential dimensions of folding into oneself when recounting the migration tale, and how this body posture indexes and evokes a melancholy sensibility shared among many Anlo-Ewe people in diaspora as well as at 'home'. Anlo cultural memory is approached from the standpoint of phenomenology in ethnography, and the essay explores connections among landscapes, livelihood, bodily sensations, a certain present, a particular past, in addition to Anlo-Ewe interlocutors and an ethnographer. It is meant as a meditation on lived experience and consciousness in Anlo-Ewe worlds.

KEY WORDS ■ Africa, Ghana, Anlo-Ewe, cultural identity, cultural memory, embodiment, phenomenology, sensory experience, subjectivity

Past and present, body and land

Several years before I first traveled to Africa, some time in the late 1980s, a friend of mine who lived in Washington, DC told me a story about his people – his ancestors and relatives in West Africa – who are commonly referred to as ‘the Anlo-Ewe’ (pronounced Anlo-Ewe or Ahng-low Eh-vay).¹ Kwame recounted their migration legend depicting his ancestors’ escape from slavery (in the 17th century) and how they came to inhabit the land now known as the southern Volta Region of Ghana. He then explained that by late colonial and postcolonial times his people were no longer slaves but rather they made up a prominent political force in contemporary Ghanaian society.²

Linkages between the two parts of Kwame’s account define the subject of this article. The connections are at once rooted in the land – the terrain and soil often referred to as an Anlo Homeland – and in the body – the ways in which their name, Anlo, has its origins in a body posture commonly referred to in Euro-American contexts as ‘the fetal position’. Approaching these two dimensions of Anlo cultural history from the standpoint of phenomenology in ethnography, I will attempt to trace linkages between land and body, between the present and the past, as a way of exploring aspects of lived experience and consciousness in Anlo-Ewe worlds.

Landscapes, bodies, present and past, invoked in the following text are best understood in relation to the notion of fields. While the article turns our attention largely toward the homeland, what we might think of as ‘Anlo-Ewe culture’ extends far beyond that littoral and the bodies currently inhabiting that specific place. Anlo-Ewe cultural worlds exist on a plane tied to but independent of any specific time and place. Kwame lives in Washington, DC, and has resided there for nearly 30 years. He rarely has the opportunity or resources to spend much time, anymore, in the Anlo Homeland. Despite his remoteness (in a spatial as well as temporal sense), and despite leading an extremely full life in the United States, Kwame (and many other individuals) regularly experience what we might call Anlo-Eweness, or an Anlo-Ewe ‘influence’.

By ‘influence’ I mean that independent of social proximity to other Anlo-Ewe people, and independent of contact with Anlo-Ewe land or material culture, one still has the possibility of experiencing a full-bodied cultural force. Fields are non-material regions of influence exhibiting material effects. We know that it is an inherently human instinct to impose a name on such designated regions of influence. But we also know that such names are inevitably arbitrary, partial and constructed; they are politically and historically derived. That said, the particular name ‘Anlo-Ewe’ designates a field of influence with currency among hundreds of thousands of people – or more – in West Africa and in diaspora. It also designates a field into which

I have been pulled with a monumental force. This article, then, seeks to reflect not only on critical aspects of this name, but also to highlight processes of fieldwork that are unique (I believe) to experiences that result from practicing an anthropology steeped in a paradigm of embodiment.

Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology (Csordas, 1990) encourages us to take seriously questions of presence and engagement, as well as perceptual experience, as we make our way through (into, around and about) fields of influence we have gravitated toward. That is to say, when ethnographers work and play in the field, it is certainly important to collect discourse and data – produce field notes, text, multi-media documentation – but not at the expense of attentiveness to intersubjective engagements from which the data and field notes are derived. As a complement to semiotics, embodiment is a methodological perspective organically incorporating the corporeal into ethnographic modes.

In that vein, this article revolves around certain classic anthropological objects: a homeland, a migration myth and a name. But it disrupts our understanding of such objects by refusing to provide a ‘thickly descriptive’ picture of a static homeland and a mythically fixed name. It privileges, instead, indeterminate and intersubjective moments from within the field and without. Organic to conditions of fieldwork, some of these moments are semiotic; others are biographical and autobiographical. Some moments invoke historical sensibilities; others appeal to a musical ear. All of them reflect indeterminacy. From an Anlo-Ewe point of view, they are in jeopardy of washing out to sea. Intentionally diverging from the standard anthropological presentation that hinges on an organized ethnic-ethnographic report, this article treats the field not as a place of which a picture can be drawn, nor as a series of events that can be reported, but as an indeterminate and ongoing influence. The field, here, is continuous with Anlo-Eweness. And so this article explores a cultural phenomenology of the fetal position by meditating on a bodily gesture of folding into oneself, which illuminates critical perspectives on Anlo-Eweness.

Feelingfulness of terrain

‘As place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place.’ Steven Feld (1996: 91) calls this assertion of his a ‘doubly reciprocal motion’, and Edward Casey (1996: 19) invokes Feld’s phrase to make the point that we are simultaneously ‘never without perception’ and ‘never without emplaced experiences’. Kwame described the place that he grew up as poor. By ‘poor’ he did not mean culturally deprived, because he often spontaneously danced *Agbadza* and maintained that American jazz and other Western art forms derived from the music and inspirations of his very

people.³ But by 'poor' he meant that the sandy soil on the coast of south-eastern Ghana consistently failed to produce more than small-small garden eggs (eggplants), bitter oranges, dry tomatoes, hard-time corn and so forth.

Kwame's perceptions of Anlo-land as *poor* seemed to be shaped by two other significant factors. First, he contrasted his Anlo Homeland with that of Asanteland (designating another ethno-linguistic group situated in Ghana), which readily yields the lucrative products of cocoa, timber and gold. Second, Kwame lamented the point in the 1960s when his hometown of Keta was overlooked in favor of Tema as the site of postcolonial Ghana's national port. In his youth, Keta thrived as a port town: the docking of European ships provided Keta with a continual flow (in and out) of cloth, beads, vegetables, spices and so forth. His mother was a bead trader and his father served as a manager in the United Africa Company. The bustling atmosphere of business and trade in Keta that Kwame remembered as a child came to an end when Tema, a town closer to the capital city Accra, was designated the national port. From then on Keta was neglected, and, as sea erosion increased and the nation failed to erect a barrier wall, miles and miles of Keta and other parts of the Anlo Homeland were lost to the water.⁴

As I entered the Anlo Homeland for the first time in 1992, how much of Kwame's sense of the place of his childhood did I carry with me? Kwame's perceptions, built through emplaced experiences, were of a poor, almost disintegrating place; and the *feelingfulness* (to use Feld's term) in Kwame's portrayal of the destitute situation of Anlo-land would be hard to shake.

His brother drove the Mercedes that I rode in, and I remember being awed (shortly after passing through Dabala Junction) by specific silk cotton trees majestically standing alone in an expanse of grass, and then again (once we had reached the coast) by luxuriant green carpets of flourishing shallots. But I put aside the pleasant and sensuous associations I gleaned from those isolated items, and instead concentrated on perceptions of 'poorness' that I felt obligated to feel and see. I did this because, by the time I made my first trip to Anlo-Land, in addition to Kwame's account, several Anlo people (in the US and then in Accra) had conveyed to me with deep sadness the adversity they felt their relatives lived with in a *poor* place that was dissolving into the sea. In fact, on the morning of my first day in Keta, Kwame's cousin took me to meet one of their elderly relatives who we found sitting on a chair on the porch of his house as water washed up the steps and spilled on to his feet. His house would be gone in a matter of months or a year, but he refused to abandon his home. His relatives checked on him daily to make sure he had not washed out to sea along with the portal.

'As place is sensed, senses are placed', according to Feld (1996: 91). What were the implications for Kwame and other Anlo people of the disintegration of their natal place? In 1994, when I had returned to Ghana, I met an

American linguist who had been working with Ewe-speakers on and off for 20-some years. We had a brief conversation, but I will never forget how he asked me, 'Don't you find Ewe people rather *morose*? I feel exhausted and depressed as I work through translations of their poems and songs, and as I listen to narratives about their ancestors and traditions – because they seem so invested in the woe that they associate with their history and lives.' I was startled not by the content of his observation but by his frankness and his use of the term 'morose'. On one hand I felt reluctant to generalize or characterize an Anlo or an Anlo-Ewe ethos in such a way, not simply because generalizations tend to be unacceptable in anthropology these days (for example, see Abu-Lughod, 1991, on anthropologies of the particular), but also because of the very hearty sense of humor possessed by so many Anlo and Ewe people that I knew. 'Morose' was the initial term he used, but what resonated for me was a kind of melancholy – a sorrowful and mournful affect – that he attributed to many of the Ewe individuals with whom he had worked over the years. I later heard non-Ewe Ghanaians characterize Ewe people (especially Anlo-Ewes) as inward, philosophical and introspective.

The flight from ɲɔtsie and the telling of a migration myth

Shortly after this encounter with the linguist, I began to notice that a shift had occurred in my response to their migration story. As I noted earlier, I had originally heard this story some time in the late 1980s (in the US) from my friend Kwame.⁵ And in the course of research on Ewe culture and history, I had also read brief accounts of the flight from ɲɔtsie in numerous sources.⁶ But once I arrived in Accra and began spending time out in the rural areas around Keta and Anloga (at first in 1992, and later for a longer stretch through 1994 and 1995), more than 20 additional people related their migration story to me. Perhaps it was simply that I was a 'newcomer' to Anlo-land, or perhaps it was due to the nature of my questions, but I was never the less unprepared for how often I would be told this particular story. I even felt annoyance, sometimes, at having to sit through it yet another time. I knew all the twists and turns of the narrative by heart – trying to make rope from clay that contained thorns, throwing water against the wall, walking backwards out of the city and so forth – and in retrospect I was clearly failing to appreciate, during those initial months, the significance of this story to their sense of identity as well as to the questions at the heart of my own research.

After the conversation with the linguist I realized that at the point in the narrative when the person described how their ancestor, Togbui Wenya, rolled up from fatigue, I had begun to mimic the curving forward of the

story-teller's bodily gesture. Here is one oral account of their migration story told by a middle aged gentleman I will call Mr Tamakloe, who allowed me to tape-record as we spoke in English at his home in the town of Anloga.

We Anlo were not always here; we once lived in ɛɔtsie or Hogbe which is located in what's now Ghana's neighboring nation of Togo. But back in the 17th century our ancestors lived in the walled city of ɛɔtsie. We weren't called the Anlo then, but Dogboawo. Most of the kings of ɛɔtsie were benevolent, but then Agokoli took power some time around 1650. Agokoli was a tyrant who took delight in tormenting his people by ordering them to make rope out of 'swish' or clay filled with thorns. Well, as for that, no one can make a rope from a pile of mud, especially when your hands bleed, so our ancestors suffered under Agokoli's rule.

They began plotting their escape. It was a walled city, you know. And Agokoli had plenty, plenty soldiers keeping watch over his workforce. Many people say our ancestors in ɛɔtsie were slaves. But it wasn't the same kind of slavery that happened when they were forced onto ships for *Ablotsi* – your place – so I'm going to call them his workforce.

The day for escape began with vigorous drumming. The men drummed to entertain and distract the soldiers while the women packed minimal necessary items into their *keviwo* [headloadable baskets]. For days the women had been throwing their wash water against one small section of the wall. Some even say they urinated on the wall to make it soft. By midnight the drumming was at its peak and the soldiers had wandered away to sleep off their *akpeteshie* [an alcoholic drink]. An old man named Tegli offered up a prayer that the wall break open easily, and then he stabbed a machete into the softened mud. The wall fell and all the women and children went through first with the leaders. The elderly men followed, and finally the young men and the drummers escaped, and they walked backwards (*zo megbemegbe*) to make footprints that would deceive the soldiers. The tracks would make it appear as though the walled city was under siege, and cause the soldiers to search inside for the intruders, giving our ancestors time to travel far from Notsie long before Agokoli realized they had escaped.

Some traveled directly westward from ɛɔtsie to the central part of the Volta River. Their descendants are the northern Ewe living around Kpando and in and around Ho. Most of the Dogboawo went southwest from ɛɔtsie. Togbui Wenya and his nephew Sri were among those who led their relatives south. It was a long, long journey; many hundreds of miles on foot, carrying their babies on their backs, balancing loads on top of their heads. Togbui Wenya and his followers established Wheta-Atiteti, and then moved on to settle Keta, Tegbi and Woe. Finally, when Wenya arrived at the place we now call Anloga, he collapsed and said, *Nyeamea meɲɔ afiaɔkekeyiyi megale nunye o* – which means 'I am rolled or coiled up from exhaustion and I

cannot travel further.’ So Wenya’s followers stopped right there, and somehow the place has been called Anloga – Big Anlo – since that time.

As Mr Tamakloe conveyed those final few sentences, he wrapped his hands around the outside of his arms, folded his head over toward his knees, and curled up into a ball – simulating Togbui Wenya’s weariness or fatigue upon reaching the piece of land that was subsequently referred to as Anloga.⁷ As I had become conditioned to anticipate this climax, I also rolled up. But after the conversation with the linguist, this seemingly small mimetic event became magnified in my mind. As the place they call their homeland was beginning to make sense to me, I was beginning to wonder about how the sensations experienced in curling up into what I knew as ‘the fetal position’ could influence or *shape* one’s consciousness of *place* (*place* being culturally as well as materially constituted). In other words, in applying Casey’s (1996) notion of ‘emplacement’ to Anlo contexts, was there a relationship between the nearly barren landscape of the Anlo Homeland, and the inward turning bodily motion of ɛlɔ that we find encoded in their name?

On the poetics, aesthetics and iconicity of ɛlɔ

‘ɛlɔsɛ is to the Ewe what Ife is to the Yoruba’, wrote Ewe scholar William Komla Amoaku (1975), with Ife representing a kind of Mecca or Jerusalem. ‘ɛlɔsɛ represents the “symbolism of the center”, where their spiritual and political power originated.⁸ The history of their dispersion from this center is, therefore, often told under oath, for it is regarded as sacred history’ (Amoaku, 1975: 88). No oaths were ever sworn when the story was narrated to me, which may be accounted for by the differences in location and time. That is, Amoaku’s work was conducted in the early 1970s primarily in northern Ewe-land, around Ho, where he grew up; whereas I conducted research more than 20 years later primarily in southern Ewe-land with people who referred to themselves as Anlo (a dialect and sub-grouping of the larger ethnic designation Ewe). The story seemed to be presented to me more as a legend with a secular quality, so if any Anlo people regarded it as ‘sacred history’, I had teetered on complete impudence in the irreverent attitude I had taken toward hearing about Togbui Wenya rolling up into a ball. But herein lies part of the paradox which will be elaborated when I flesh out the second account that Kwame related to me concerning the social circumstances of Anlo people in contemporary Ghana.

When I would point out to Anlo people that they were named in honor of ‘rolling up’ with fatigue, I was inevitably met with a response of hearty laughter. This occurred even in the context of recounting the migration

story. So while I cannot say that the migration story from ηῶtsie was a 'sacred history' with the people who hosted me, the sheer number of times I heard the story was testimony to its significance.⁹ In addition, a slightly different story was probably recounted in the northern Volta Region, since the climax would not be Togbui Wenya arriving at the coast and rolling up. But Togbui Wenya's 'Meηlɔ' was certainly a focal point in the telling of the story in the south (as well as among Anlo-speakers in Accra and in the US), and so, the force and the meaning of 'Nyeamea meηlɔ . . .' and their name Aηlɔ will be examined now, and I will return later to Amoaku's observation of ηῶtsie's association with *the center*.

In the Ewe language, the utterance of ηlɔ (also Meηlɔ or Aηlɔ) results in a very interesting effect on the body – an effect that is best understood in terms of synesthesia, onomatopoeia and iconicity. To speak of Meηlɔ or Aηlɔ requires a formation in the mouth, and a sonic production, which triggers a rolled up or curled up sensation and resonance throughout the body.¹⁰ The iconicity resides, in the first instance, in the curling of the tongue to duplicate the rolling up of the body that is being signaled by the term ηlɔ.

But beyond this basic iconicity, there is an aural dimension to ηlɔ (stemming largely from the nasal ɔ, rather than from the curling up of the tongue to produce the η phoneme) which synesthetically prompts feelings of a kind of texture and timbre of roundness. In his work on lift-up-over sounding, Feld (1988: 82) defined timbre as 'the building blocks of sound quality' and texture as the 'composite, realized experiential feel of the sound mass in motion', and I am suggesting here that there is an 'experiential feel' of a poetic round, rolling or curling up 'sound mass in motion' when Ewe speakers say Aηlɔ or make the statement 'Nyeamea meηlɔ . ..'. So while the action or gesture of curling up does not in any literal sense produce an accompanying sound – such that the word ηlɔ could be considered onomatopoeic in a technical sense – it synesthetically creates an 'experiential feel' of roundness or an inward spiraling kinesthetic return to the center.¹¹

When Mr Tamakloe curled up as he depicted and discussed Togbui Wenya's fatigue, it was quite clearly an 'iconic gesture' in that his action bore a close formal relationship to the semantic content of the narrative about their flight from ηῶtsie and their ancestor's exhaustion (see McNeill, 1992: 12–15, on iconic and metaphoric gestures). So on one level, we are dealing with an instance of kinesic behavior: a movement of the body that served to illustrate what was being verbally conveyed (Knapp, 1978).

In addition, we could also simply say that Mr Tamakloe's rolling up was a display of affect, for while it is usually in a facial configuration that one looks for an affective display, 'the body can also be read for global judgments of affect – for example, a drooping, sad body' (Knapp, 1978: 16). Clearly iconic and affective, here I want to explore how ηlɔ is far more than

that, and it may be said that Anlo itself is metaphoric for a sensibility and a way of being-in-the-world.

More than six years after I taped that interview with Mr Tamakloe, I phoned a friend in Houston who considers herself an Anlo-Ewe person – even though she grew up largely in Accra, and has lived in the United States for more than 20 years. Mawusi's parents had been raised in Anlo-land, they spoke the Anlo dialect of the Ewe language with their children, and Mawusi periodically visited relatives in the rural Anlo Homeland. So she has always identified as an Anlo-Ewe person.

I phoned her and very directly posed the following question: 'You know how the term Anlo literally means to roll up or curl up in the fetal position?' Mawusi laughed and said, 'Yesss?' I then asked, 'What does it mean to you to be part of a people whose name means rolled up?' In her lengthy response were the words 'resentment and respect'. She said that curling up in the fetal position is something you do when you feel sad, when you are crying, when you are lonely or depressed. Mawusi indicated that being Anlo meant you felt that way a lot, but you always had to unroll or come out of it, eventually, and that gave you a feeling of strength. I told her that I had used the terms 'persecution and power' in one discussion I had delivered about the name Anlo, and I asked if that fit with what she meant. Mawusi confirmed that it did.

Resentment and respect. Probing such a sensibility, an orientation in the world that makes reference to persecution and power, led me to tracing links between the two accounts Kwame had related to me: their escape from slavery and migration from ɲotsie 300 years ago, and their ascendance to a position of influence in contemporary Ghana. The connections seemed to coalesce poignantly around feelings associated with ɲlo – and here I have glossed ɲlo as 'the fetal position' but this translation does not map perfectly from one language and cultural context to the next. While ɲlo refers to a bodily position in which one folds or rolls up (curving inward as is customary for a baby in the womb), ɲlo does not directly correspond to the posture of a fetus, and it has a very different emotional valence than does 'the fetal position' in Euro-American contexts.

Most if not all human groups probably acknowledge this rolled up (ɲlo) position (miming, as it were, a fetus). But what it means, in what circumstances it is invoked, how it is encoded in local languages, the ways it is elaborated or repressed, are just some of the issues we can wonder about as we resist the assumption of equivalence from one cultural world to the next (cf. Jackson, 1996: 1). With Togbui Wenyá's '*Nyeamea meɲlo . . .*' as a critical moment in their migration story, and with Anlo as both a toponym and a marker for personhood, I am led to ask about the consciousness of ɲlo in its 'lived immediacy' among Anlo-Ewe people.

Embodied consciousness

Toward that end, I want to now shift our notion of $\eta\lambda\omicron$ away from that of 'the fetal position' and instead make use of Thomas Csordas's concept of 'somatic modes of attention' to bring to the foreground culturally embedded and interactional dimensions of $\eta\lambda\omicron$. By somatic modes of attention, Csordas means 'culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others' (1993: 138). Csordas's elegant synthesis of strands of thinking from Merleau-Ponty and Schutz to Bourdieu, provides a rigorous retheorizing of 'the body' aimed largely at enriching the ethnographic endeavor. That is, he urges us to move beyond simplistic treatments of the-body-as-object, and toward a methodological approach in which embodiment refers to a 'condition' – a circumstance of being human that is necessarily predicated on agency with all that entails about cultural-sensory-emotional engagement in the world.

In this vein, Csordas suggests that instead of confining ourselves to a hermeneutics rooted solely in the cognitive and the affective, we might also make use of analytic categories such as intuition, imagination, perception and sensation. Not cast as an end in itself, an approach that invokes these additional categories allows us more easily to return to the phenomena itself, to deal with the intersubjective nature of the phenomena, and to appreciate what Merleau-Ponty referred to as the bodily synthesis. Rather than separating and distinguishing self and other, mind and body, cognition and affect, place and person, and so forth, the point is to trace mutual constitutions, connections, emplacements, synesthesias, etc., since lived experience is not compartmentalized into cognitive and affective existences.¹²

Merleau-Ponty asserted (1962: 153) that 'our body is not an object for an "I think," it is a grouping of lived-through meanings which moves toward its equilibrium'. It is important to note his choice of the word 'equilibrium' here rather than a word that would conjure up a fixed form or determinate object. In turn, Merleau-Ponty's principle of indeterminacy becomes a vital tool in collapsing dualities in which we are accustomed to theorizing. In regard to this principle, Csordas (1993: 148–9) suggests that:

The indeterminacy in our analytic categories is revealed when we encounter phenomena as essentially ambiguous as somatic modes of attention. This indeterminacy, it turns out, is an essential element of our existence. Merleau-Ponty objected to conceiving perception as an intellectual act of grasping external stimuli produced by pre-given objects. Instead, he argued that the perceptual synthesis of the object is accomplished by the subject, which is the body as a field of perception and practice. In effect, Merleau-Ponty's existential analysis collapses the subject-object duality in order to pose more

precisely the question of how attention and other reflective processes of the intellect constitute cultural objects.

Here I want to explore that particular question of how ‘attention and other reflective processes of the intellect’ constitute a cultural object such as *ɛɛ*. What does it mean to grow up with *ɛɛ* as an underlying theme (albeit on an unconscious level) of one’s cultural history, identity and ethnicity? How does a person make sense of *ɛɛ* as a fundamental aspect of *Anɛɛtɔwo* (one’s people), *Anɛɛga* (one’s ancestral homeland) and *Anɛɛgbe* (the language one speaks)?¹³ I would suggest that, as a historically constituted object, *ɛɛ* paradoxically symbolizes *freedom* from enslavement and *exhaustion* from the flight, *joy* for the arrival at a new homeland and *sorrow* for those who died along the way. It is emblematic of *comedy* in the sense that people often laugh when discussing the fact that their name means ‘rolled up’, and *tragedy* in the sense that *ɛɛ* is mimetic of (Togbui Wenya’s) aging, returning to the fetal position, ‘rolling up’ and into the ground.

Merleau-Ponty (1962: 148) surmised that ‘To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world . . . our body is not primarily *in* space, it is of it.’ Anlo-Ewe people are of that time-space of *ɛɛtsie* on to Keta–Anloga–Anyako (etc.) of the Anlo Homeland to Ghana and West Africa in general, to living in Europe and the US, and still telling that story (replete with emplacement) of the flight from *ɛɛtsie* and Togbui Wenya folding into himself when he reached what is now *Anɛɛga*. What interests me is how *ɛɛ* constitutes and is constituted by the ‘existential condition’ of being Anlo.

And so, a list of (determinate) dualities fails to capture the phenomenological dimension of *ɛɛ* which I am trying to impart, for *ɛɛ* is part of ‘the lived world of perceptual phenomena’ in which ‘our bodies are not objects to us’. That is:

. . . the ambiguity between subject and object extends to our distinctions between mind and body, and between self and other. With regard to the first of these distinctions, if we begin with the *lived world of perceptual phenomena*, *our bodies are not objects to us*. Quite the contrary, they are an integral part of the perceiving subject. (Csordas, 1993: 149, emphasis added)

This points first to the question of whether we can separate the *ɛɛ* of the body from the *ɛɛ* of the mind. While the ideational aspects of *ɛɛ* are of paramount importance, does *ɛɛ* not also have a deeply and inextricably *embodied* kinesthetic and interoceptive (sensuous) dimension? Or, put another way, is it possible to understand or explain the culturally constituted ‘object’ we are calling *ɛɛ* from a purely cognitive (or even an affective) standpoint? I would suggest that in Csordas’s (and Merleau-Ponty’s) terms, *ɛɛ* is an ‘integral part of the perceiving subject’. That is, a bodily synthesis for Anlo people includes a kind of *ɛɛ* (rolling up) orientation that

makes it part of the condition or the lived experience of growing up Anlo. Finally, the faculty of mimesis at play with ḡḡ makes the self of a present-day Anlo-speaking person 'bound magically to an Other' (Taussig, 1993: 253) in the copying of Togbui Wenya's ḡḡ. The chain of copies, of course, extends to my own folding into myself, and then to so deep a fascination with the phenomena that I have attempted to inscribe it here.

As I mentioned earlier, the migration story was told to me on numerous occasions and by a variety of different individuals.¹⁴ Furthermore, when it was recounted, certain individuals imitated Togbui Wenya's curling up – a kind of mimetic rehearsal of the somatic mode of attention reflected in their name. What influences occur when a person 'rehearses' (mimics, re-lives, re-enacts) Togbui Wenya's ḡḡ? On one hand, the experience could be reduced to a cognitive process of intellectual reflection in which Togbui Wenya and his behaviors are 'objectified' or treated as an historical and cultural object distinct from the story-teller. But an intriguing part of this puzzle is why in more than a dozen instances people did not simply relay the story in words, but also mimed the *meḡḡ* of Togbui Wenya folding into himself. As the months proceeded and I became *sensitized* to Anlo *sensibilities*, my own bodily response to the climax of the story was to join in – hence a copying of the miming of this almost primordial somatic mode: the rolling up of Togbui Wenya expressing his exhaustion. The point here is that among many Anlo-Ewe individuals, there exists an attention to ḡḡ – a probably unconscious, and clearly *somatic mode of attention* – which defies delineation in our traditional analytic categories.

One way to treat this culturally constituted phenomenon is to return to the phenomenon itself, and to fully embrace the *indeterminacy* of ḡḡ. Csordas explains (1993: 149) that 'the "turning toward" that constitutes the object of attention cannot be *determinate* in terms of either subject or object, but only *real* in terms of intersubjectivity'. Consequently, ḡḡ becomes 'real' in a time and space between body, mind, self, other, subject and object (rather than exclusively in one of those domains).¹⁵ Such 'indeterminacy' as is illustrated here is an essential aspect of one's existence in the 'lived world of perceptual phenomena' in which Anlo-Ewe people exist. In rethinking ḡḡ in terms of *somatic modes of attention* – an 'attending to and with one's body' – I raise the question of what is ḡḡ itself a turning toward? What is gleaned not only cognitively (which may turn out to be the least fruitful analytic category in relation to ḡḡ), but what is experienced in terms of intuition, emotion, imagination, perception and sensation?¹⁶

Resentment and respect

I have thus far made reference to or described several dualistic phenomena which inhabit or constitute the idea, the experience, the mimesis we find in ηlo : *freedom* and *exhaustion*, *joy* and *sorrow*, *humor* and *grief*. While this portrayal connotes a holistic and balanced essence for ηlo , I believe that in general ηlo tends more toward the exhaustion, sorrow and grief side of the equation. Earlier I suggested this relates to the iconicity of ηlo , and the way that the utterance itself can synesthetically create an ‘experiential feel’ of roundness or an inward spiraling kinesthetic motion toward the center. This is not to suggest that most Anlo-speaking people are completely ‘inward’ or ‘morose’ (as was the feeling of the linguist immersed in translating funeral dirges and laments), but I do think that ‘being Anlo’ – *Anlo-ness* or *Anlo-Ewe-ness* (if you will) – involves a certain sense of persecution and a feeling of being misunderstood, maligned and feared – a deeply embodied sensibility that is difficult to disentangle from the melancholy and inward-turning somatic expression ηlo . One question this raises is why some Anlo-Ewe people feel persecuted and misunderstood, and how does this relate back to the two accounts of Anlo cultural history I first heard from my friend in Washington, DC?

The question centering on feelings of persecution is best addressed from both an historical and more contemporary psycho-social point of view. The migration story recounted earlier indicates that Anlo-Ewe people have lived in their present homeland for about 300 years and came there due to persecution by King Agokoli who ruled ηotsie . Histories of Ewe-speaking peoples prior to their life in ηotsie also focus on movement westward out of Oyo and then Ketu, presumably as a result of persecution. Hence, the telling of histories among Anlo-speaking people rehearses (almost mythologically) stories and collective self-images revolving around persecution and flight from oppressive situations, triumphing in escape and freedom, and facing persecution in yet another place.

One can judge the pervasiveness of this view from a small pamphlet I purchased at a bookstore in Anloga. The pamphlet was written and produced by a secondary school student named Solomon M.K. Barawusu and is entitled *The Hogbetsotso Festival: A Comparison Between the Liberation of the Ewes from Slavery in Notsie – Togo – Under the Wicked King Agorkorli and the Liberation of the Israelites from Slavery in Egypt Under the Wicked King Pharaoh*. The opening lines of Barawusu’s poem in free verse are as follows:

If there have ever existed
Any twin nations of the world
With astounding records of similarity

In their struggle from slavery to freedom
 Such twin undisputable nations
 Are the Israelites and the Ewes
 The Bible and Ewe history
 Prove them sisters in terms of slavery
 Brothers in terms of leadership
 Comrades in terms of liberation
 And friends in terms of escape
 Both had common obstacles
 That stood in their way to freedom
 The Israelites had a wicked Pharaoh
 After serving under kind ones

The Ewes also had a wicked King – Agorkorli
 After serving under kind ones . . . (Barawusu, n.d.)

I quote this pamphlet simply to make the point that the self-image of persecution was sufficiently prevalent among Anlo-speaking people that in the 1990s a secondary school student could write and sell locally (through distribution in bookstores) a document such as this. The historical accuracy or the validity of the comparison between the Ewes and the Israelites is not what matters here, but rather what is of interest is the issue of self-perceptions, ethnic imaginings, cultural memory and a kind of *mythos*. By *mythos* I mean a pattern of beliefs or orientations which symbolically represent some of the prevalent attitudes within a group of people, and the *mythos* alluded to in the student's poem is implicated in $\eta\lambda\omega$. It is implicated through the isomorphic relationship of $\eta\lambda\omega$ as a turning inward, a coiling up somatic mode that attends to and expresses a melancholy and sorrow that pervades Anlo-Ewe sensibilities and stories about the past.

Historians attest to the reality of this experience of persecution, which is at the heart of the second account I first heard from Kwame in Washington, DC, and which was subsequently reinforced by additional Anlo people. Many Anlo people have often commented to me on how the territory constituting the Anlo-Ewe Homeland is devoid of any rich natural resources (particularly in comparison with the gold, cocoa and timber prevalent in the areas occupied by Asante peoples who live in the forest zone of Ghana). Sandra Greene (1985: 83) points out that 'after the advent of colonial rule the Anlo sought to overcome the limited opportunities available to them in their own area by emigrating to non-Anlo/non-Ewe districts in Ghana'. She then explains that 'while few studies exist on Anlo relations with other ethnic groups, it appears that it was not uncommon for the Anlo and other Ewes in diaspora to be the subject of rumor and suspicion' (Greene, 1985: 83).

Greene's discussion makes reference to several specific historical incidents which could certainly be interpreted as 'persecution' of Anlo-Ewe-speaking people (such as the burning of villages), and she explains how other ethnic groups in Ghana consistently perceive Anlo-Ewe speakers to be 'thieves, kidnappers, sorcerers, and ritual murderers', or as people who dabble in 'sorcery and evil medicine' (Greene, 1985: 83–4). Her review of several studies led to the conclusion that:

In systematic surveys among and interviews with Ghanaian university and secondary school students, as well 'the general adult population' about the images of members of other ethnic groups, all respondents consistently described the Ewe in some of the most negative stereotypical terms. (Greene, 1985: 84)

The historical and cultural factors underpinning this situation of animosity certainly deserve careful and lengthy consideration, but a full exploration of relations among various ethnic groups in Ghana is clearly beyond the scope of this article.¹⁷ The point I believe this material makes is that while negative stereotypes of Ewe-speakers are generally cultivated by other ethnic groups, they also serve to feed Anlo-speakers' self-perceptions of persecution. Relevant to our discussion here, therefore, is how various Anlo individuals explained Greene's conclusions.

Before discussing Anlo explanations, let me momentarily address the issue of how these forms of being and culturally constituted psychological orientations that I have just described can also be approached in terms of *history being turned into nature* (Bourdieu's *habitus*) and as *sensibilities* or perduring moods and dispositions 'patterned within the workings of a body' (Desjarlais, 1992: 150). Anloga is the ritual capital of Anlo-land, and the place where 300 years ago their ancestor Togbui Wenya purportedly experienced the emotional and sensory feelings of ɲɔ – when he bent over, curved his body inward with arms and legs drawn toward his chest, resting and determining that his people would rest there too. This intensely sensuous and evocative bodily expression was not simply carried forward nominally for the subsequent three centuries, but can be seen as one of the more profound displays of Bourdieu's idea about *history being turned into nature*. That is, in ɲɔ itself we find an indexical sign of a central feature of what we might call an Anlo sensibility: the perduring mood of sorrow and woe that is counterbalanced by the sense of strength and vigor when springing back out of this position. As one young man explained in a letter:

There is an Anlo proverb which states that *Amea deke metsɔa anyidzefe wɔa mlɔfe o* – Nobody makes the place he fell his sleeping bed. Togbui Wenya may roll or curl up but he will surely spring back with strength, power, and energy to resist every form of enemy persecution and domination. *Nyeamea*

mɛŋlɔ has defined our worldview as far as fear of subordination by other ethnic groups is concerned. (Adikah, 2000: 5)

Many Anlo-speaking people with whom I worked began their explanations of persecution with reference to the dearth of natural resources (mentioned earlier) in their own homeland. They explained that since the land provided limited opportunities for livelihood or for inheritance of wealth, the place of Anlo-land itself was a source of depression. While it remained a place they held close to their heart because it was the ground of their heritage and childhood (in the case of many individuals), Anlo-land did not provide a ready source of sustenance with its sandy soil and lack of industry in the late 20th century. Due to these conditions, many Anlo people have stressed education for their children and the development of skills which would allow them to work in other areas and to mingle with other ethnic groups. A friend at the university reported that in greeting him one day an Ewe professor commented that education is 'the only mineral resource we have'.¹⁸

Anlo-Ewe people often pointed out how they typically learned various other languages spoken in Ghana (such as Twi, Ga, Akan or Fante) but they very seldom encountered an (ethnically) non-Ewe Ghanaian who could speak Ewe. This emphasis on education has led to perceptions of Ewe people in general and Anlo-Ewes in particular playing the role of what some call the 'intelligentsia' in contemporary Ghana.¹⁹ What they meant was that while Ewe people (and especially Anlo-Ewes) were a minority in Ghana, they were also conspicuously active and present in the professional and educated sector of the nation. A number of people explained that while other ethnic groups claimed this was due to nepotism or 'tribalism', among Anlo people it was perceived as resulting from the higher percentage of Ewes (compared to other ethnic groups) who achieved advanced levels of education and who were therefore qualified for civil sector and professional occupations.

Anlo individuals often expressed that they pursued work in the civil sector due to limited economic opportunities in their homeland, and the self-perception of being Ghana's 'intelligentsia' was considered as burdensome as it was beneficial. This burden/benefit or resentment/respect *mythos* is implicated in the trope of *ŋlɔ* (rolling, coiling up) as a somatic and kineshetic mode that attends to and expresses a sensibility featuring melancholy and sorrow. As my friend in Houston explained, 'Being Anlo, for me, is about respect and resentment: on one hand they respect us for being so industrious and hard working, but then they turn around and resent us when we succeed. It just makes me sad.'

Another explanation about why Ewe people in general were feared, disliked or negatively stereotyped, revolved around their classic ritual

practices and religious system, commonly referred to by outsiders as *voodoo* or *vodu* (for background, see Blier, 1995; Geurts, 2002a; Gilbert, 1982; Meyer, 1999; Rosenthal, 1998). All over the world the English term *voodoo* elicits pejorative images and thoughts that illustrate why practitioners have frequently been labeled 'thieves, kidnappers, sorcerers, and ritual murderers' (Greene, 1985: 84). In fact, *vodu* is an ancient metaphysical philosophy and set of sacred practices involving the use of herbs, incantations, sculpture and so forth, reinforcing Ewe moral codes (see Geurts, 2002a: 190–6).

The fact that Anlo people themselves realized others in Ghana perceived aspects of their classic religion in a very negative light is evidenced by the deeper issue being addressed by Greene in the work referred to earlier about ethnic relations in Ghana.²⁰ Greene suggests an explanation for why the office of the paramount chief (known as *awoamefia*) was once clearly associated with religious and ritual practices, while more recently these associations have been omitted or dropped in most oral accounts of traditions and history surrounding the paramount chief.

Most place emphasis in their discussions of the nature of the Anlo political system on the non-religious aspects of the *awoamefia* office; they also omit or downplay any reference to the role of religion in any of the other political offices as well. Instead they focus on those features in the political system that they themselves note are quite different in kind, but nevertheless share some common characteristics with the perceived predominantly secular Akan political culture that has come increasingly to dominate the popular image of southern Ghanaian culture in general. This, I believe, is not an unconscious act of omission, but reflects the concerns of these scholars not to focus on information that can be misinterpreted and misused to besmirch the image of the Anlo (Greene, 1985: 84).

Since Anlo-Ewe religious practices were feared and viewed in a negative light by so many Ghanaians, West Africans and 'outsiders' in general, associations between such actions and the paramount chief (as well as other political phenomena) were gradually downplayed.

In other circumstances, however, fear of Anlo-Ewe ritual powers was clearly exploited since stories abounded among Ghanaians about the potency of Ewe *juju*. A vignette from my fieldwork in 1994 may illustrate this point. The situation revolved around Marion, who was a young American researcher in Accra. She had purchased a 12-foot piece of *adinkra* cloth in the marketplace of the Center for National Culture, but when she delivered the cloth to her seamstress (an Anlo woman with whom I was also acquainted) Marion learned that the cloth was old and would soon shred apart. Indeed, the seamstress showed me the very fabric, and by pulling gently on the threads she highlighted the loose weave of the *adinkra* (cloth). Marion's Anlo-Ewe friend, neighbor and occasional research assistant,

Rejoice, suggested that Marion had been cheated and they should confront the merchant who sold her the cloth.

Several weeks later they recounted to me how they went to the market together and Rejoice appealed to the merchant while speaking a combination of English and Twi (the national *lingua franca*), but the merchant and her partners refused to exchange the *adinkra* for a newer, more durable fabric. The dialogue escalated into a heated argument, but the merchant refused to budge. Rejoice then began escorting Marion toward the exit, stopped and, turning around to face the merchant, declared loudly and *in Ewe*: '*Miekpɔge loo!*', which translates as 'You will see!' but is closer in meaning to the English phrase 'Just you wait!' and connotes a curse or impending recourse to sorcery. They then turned and exited the market. Approximately five minutes later the market woman's son came running up to them with a splendid piece of *adinkra*, beseeching them to exchange it for the old and tattered cloth. The transaction was completed and they left.

In reflecting on this story we can appreciate moments of intense indeterminacy that help to illustrate how perception begins in the body and ends in objects (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Rejoice begins her appeal by using reason and common languages – both in the literal and figurative sense. That is, she speaks in the *lingua franca* (comprehensible to all present) and asks for a simple exchange (a material-commercial transaction focused on money or better cloth). When this approach fails to produce a positive result, a number of intersubjective exchanges trigger emotional-imaginative experiences and perceptions of 'objects' that were absent from the dialogue moments before: the Ewe language, ethnicity, alterity, power, danger rooted in *juju*. That is, a process of objectification occurs: Rejoice makes it known that she is Ewe, which in and of itself signifies access to the powers of a potent curse based in *vodu*. This display thereby exploits, to a certain extent, general perceptions of Ewe people: that they could and would resort to using a curse to get their way.

Indeterminacy is important here in the following ways. While the experience of perceiving is in the first instance one of indeterminacy, it is composed of sensations, emotions, imaginations (all the conditions of our bodiliness), and the perceptions analogically link to more cognitive (cultural) models. A simple dialogue that in another context would not conjure feelings of peril, here quickly turns on a negative stereotype rooted in social history and ritual praxis. One point of phenomenology in ethnography is to 'capture that moment of transcendence in which perception begins, and, in the midst of arbitrariness and indeterminacy, constitutes and is constituted by culture' (Csordas, 1990: 9). There is a moment of transcendence in the market exchange when perceptions of Eweness begin: in the midst of arbitrariness and indeterminacy, Rejoice perceives her own Eweness as an object or a force that she can wield. The market woman and her son exhibit an ability

to perceive Eweness (in the midst of arbitrary signs) as an influence at play in their negotiations. There are ways of perceiving here that allow Eweness to become objectified. But other than for culture, Eweness would remain unpalpable, invisible – an object most people in the world possess absolutely no ability to grasp or perceive.

For Anlo-Ewe people, I would suggest, their sensibilities about Eweness or their sense of being Ewe is bound up with that *persecution and power – resentment and respect* complex I have linked to the trope of ηlo . To further probe this association let me return to the issue of what Bourdieu calls the *socially informed body*, and raise some questions concerning cultural memory.

Grasping through to the mythopoeic

The *body* that we encounter in Bourdieu is not divorced, of course, from either the mind or the social environment, but rather he insists that ‘every successfully socialized agent . . . possesses, in their *incorporated state*, the instruments of an ordering of the world, a system of classifying schemes which organize . . . practices’ (1977: 123–4, emphasis added). The *incorporated state* at question here is one of Anlo ontology. That very Anlo ontology begins, in a word, with the migration story or mythic account of how Togbui Wenya led his people out of slavery and then rolled or curled up (and declared ‘*Nyeamea me ηlo . . .*’) – a story which may have been circulating for 300 years.²¹ Bourdieu has suggested (1977: 124) that:

. . . to grasp through the constituted reality of myth the constituting moment of the mythopoeic act is not, as idealism supposes to seek in the conscious mind the universal structures of a ‘mythopoeic subjectivity’ and the unity of a spiritual principle governing all empirically realized configurations regardless of social conditions.

Bourdieu’s argument is that grasping through to the constituting moment of the mythopoeic act involves instead a reconstruction of the principle of the *socially informed body*, which is a principle that unifies and generates practices and which is inextricably cognitive and evaluative. His notion of evaluative, of course, opens the floodgates of the sensory, for evaluation involves an activity of sensitivity: tastes and distastes or compulsions and repulsions – the attentiveness and tuning out that is done in all sensory fields. Here I am suggesting that ηlo is implicated in the socially informed bodies of those sensitive to Anlo-Ewe influences – those oriented toward an Anlo-Ewe field.

But we cannot seek the mythopoeic subjectivity of ηlo merely in the conscious mind. We have to break away from our own ethnocentric

attachment to a dualistic split between conscious and unconscious and be willing to play with the indeterminate space between those categories that are often not meaningful in other cultural contexts. So without backing down from the interpretation of *ηλο* which I am putting forth here, I can acknowledge that *ηλο* is forced into what Bourdieu calls 'rational systematization and logical criticism' by virtue of the very methodology he critiques. That is to say, Bourdieu argues (1977: 123) that when a person lacks the symbolic mastery of schemes and their products, the only way such a person (an observer) can participate is by creating a model. As an anthropologist and a person who inhabits Anlo-Eweness in only a superficial sense, I construct a model of *ηλο* because it is 'the substitute required when one does not have . . . immediate mastery of the apparatus' (1977: 123). My model of *ηλο*, then, is aimed at approximating a phenomenon at work in Anlo worlds, which I am suggesting cannot be reduced to a word (*ηλο*), an event in a story (Togbui Wenya's declaration and performance of '*Nyeamea meηλο . . .*'), a body posture (rolling up or folding into oneself), an emotional-sensory state (exhaustion, sorrow, depression), or a cognitive concept (*ηλο* as a mere metaphor of persecution). *ηλο* is part of the 'system of classifying schemes', part of the 'instruments of the ordering of the world', in an Anlo *habitus* – an Anlo *habitus* that has been recapitulating a history of Togbui Wenya's *ηλο* such that we are forced to confront what this means about how *history is turned into nature*.

Merleau-Ponty suggested that in the philosophy and phenomenology of consciousness, the concept of 'institution' could serve as a kind of hinge. By institution he meant:

. . . those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning, will form an intelligible series or history – or again those events which sediment in me a meaning, not just of survivals or residues, but as the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future. (1963: 108–9)

ηλο might be that kind of *hinge*, that kind of *institution*. As an eminently polysemous symbol, it 'sediments a meaning' not just of an event 300 years ago when Togbui Wenya folded into himself, but rather it sediments a meaning that is an 'invitation to a sequel'. It invites the recapitulation of the sensations Togbui Wenya felt when he landed at the ground that has been perceived as Anlo-land ever since. And as an institution, in Merleau-Ponty's sense, *ηλο* allows for a whole series of other experiences to acquire meaning. As an Anlo-Ewe friend explained:

The *ηλο* story and *Nyeamea meηλο* invokes a participatory emotion in us. *Meηλο* conveys an image of a curling-up hedgehog. It conveys a nostalgic feeling of tiredness, fatigue, weakness and sadness borne out of

never-ending journeys across mountains, rivers, and more significantly of breaking-free from subjugation. 'At last I can relax my tired bones!' Togbui Wenya decided to ɛɔ not only because he was tired but also he might have gained a nostalgic moment and the satisfaction that his people, hedged in by the sea and the lagoon, were well protected from enemies. ɛɔtsie represents the genesis of our subjugation, our heritage, our ancestry and *Nyeamea meɛɔ* represents the climax, the conclusion after long years of suffering. ɛɔtsie is the beginning; Anloga the finishing point. When my grandmother danced backwards and later *curled up* with excitement written all over her face, it was a dramatization of the embodiment of being Anlo. (Adikah, 2000: 4)

ɛɔtsie and the center: emplacement and an aesthetics-poetics of ɛɔ

Amoaku suggested that for many Ewe people ɛɔtsie is metaphorically the sacred mountain, the *axis mundi* or the place where heaven and earth meet. He tells a story of visiting the site where ɛɔtsie used to exist²² – of standing amidst the debris of the wall – and he explains that before he left the site he engaged in washing his face with water and herbs as a 'symbol of communion with our ancestral gods' and as a means of atoning for 'deserting them' or abandoning and separating from his ancestors.

When certain Anlo-Ewe people present the story of their own flight from ɛɔtsie (Amoaku is from Ho, not Anlo-land), the event is accompanied by what for me is one of the most profound physical gestures the human body can perform: the rolling up or folding into oneself of ɛɔ. When I first tried to write about witnessing (as well as my own mimesis of) Anlo-Ewe people curling forward as they described Togbui Wenya's fatigue, I was reminded of anthropologist Michael Jackson's essay 'Knowledge of the Body'. He opens (1989: 119) with an account of beginning to practice yoga in his mid-30s. Initial work with *asanas* was like 'unpicking the locks of a cage' because prior to this his body 'passed into and out of my awareness like a stranger; whole areas of my physical being and potentiality were dead to me, like locked rooms' (cf. Stoller, 1997, on *The Scholar's Body*). I had been practicing yoga for more than 15 years before I first sojourned to Anlo-land, and I mention this because it is possible I was struck by ɛɔ in large part because of this dimension of my own embodied nature. It is commonly understood in yoga that 'forward bends' (such as what one does when rolling up or gesturing ɛɔ) are known to produce sorrow, nostalgia and grief. During one particular class I began spontaneously to weep, for reasons totally unknown to me, in the middle of a session on forward bends. My teacher quickly removed me from the group engaged in forward bends, and

set me up straightening back out, for along the lines of a principle of the obverse, forward bends must be countered or complemented with backward motion.²³

This anecdote is offered as a way of making several points. The yogic philosophy of forward bending (which asserts that rolling up or gesturing in the manner of *ɲlɔ* will necessarily generate sorrow, introspection, even grief) raises intriguing questions about how different peoples have elaborated this pose (a posture some call ‘the fetal position’). It has been difficult for me to ignore such a question in working with Anlo-Ewe people – due to the story I repeatedly heard, and due to the meaning of their name. But this comment in and of itself is not unproblematic. In his work on alterity and mimesis, Taussig discusses ‘the power of the copy to influence what it is a copy of’ (1993: 250). I was in Anlo-land to learn about an indigenous sensorium, or local sensory experiences, but I found myself hearing a story about Togbui Wenya again and again. In my own mimesis of the storyteller’s mimesis of his ancestor’s exhaustion (*meɲlɔ*) lies a complicated anthropological parable getting at the notion ‘that something crucial about what made oneself was implicated and imperilled in the object of study, in its power to change reality, no less’ (Taussig, 1993: 252–3). The excess attention I have paid (in this article) to a rolling up gesture (called *ɲlɔ*) reflects as much on me as it does on Anlo people, reinforcing the notion of ‘reality as really made-up’ (Taussig, 1993: 255). But it draws attention, I believe, to links between present, past, body and land, which are keys to understanding Anlo-Ewe consciousness and sensibilities.

And so, from *ɲlɔ* as an iconic gesture, and the onomatopoeic and synesthetic qualities I suggested accompany the utterance ‘*Nyeamea meɲlɔ . . .*’, to the yogic implications of this forward bend, I want to extend this exegesis out one final ring. I want to suggest that when certain Anlo-Ewe people present their migration myth, and we reach the moment of Togbui Wenya declaring ‘*Nyeamea meɲlɔ . . .*’, we are dealing with a ‘direct presentation of the feelingful dimension of experience’ (Armstrong quoted in Feld, 1988: 103) that characterizes what Robert Plant Armstrong means with his term ‘affecting presence’.

To explore this idea, let me direct our attention to Feld’s (1988: 103–4) synthetic distillation of Armstrong’s three works (1971, 1975, 1981) on aesthetics, consciousness and myth. Feld explains that Armstrong ‘wishes to examine works of affecting presence as direct forces and sensibilities, through which one might grasp “ . . . the very consciousness of a people, the particular conditions under which their human existence is possible” ’ (Armstrong, 1975: 82 quoted in Feld, 1988: 103). Anlo and Ewe people lived in oral societies for centuries before the Ewe language was transliterated, and story-telling as well as other verbal arts have a robust history and continue as vital forms of cultural production across West Africa.²⁴ The

myth or legend of *ɲotsie*, or the prose narrative concerning the migration, first struck me as just some story that certain people wanted me to know, but after years of reflecting on how and how often it was presented to me, I have come to regard the tale itself as a ‘work of affecting presence’ and the moment of gesturing Togbui Wenya’s folding into himself as an ‘enacted metaphor’. In the lived experience of *ɲlɔ* we can appreciate how:

... affecting presences, as works or events witnessed, are ‘constituted, in a primordial and intransigent fashion, of basic cultural psychic conditions – not symbols of those conditions but specific enactments – presentations – of those very conditions – the affecting presence is not a semblance but an actuality ... in cultural terms it presents rather than represents’. (Armstrong quoted in Feld, 1988: 103)

When Mr Tamakloe mimetically curled up, it was an enactment, a presentation of the condition of Being Anlo for more than 300 years. *ɲlɔ* emerges, then, as a trope, an enacted metaphor for a melancholy sensibility; and *ɲlɔ* exists as an embodied consciousness indeterminately engaging an obverse – persecution and power, resentment and respect.

In returning to the problem of what Csordas (1993: 147) calls a ‘nearly unbridgeable analytic gulf’ between the categories of cognition and affect, let me conclude with one final insight from Armstrong and Feld that sheds light on the story about Anlo embodied consciousness that I have tried to impart within the confines of this article. Feld suggests that through his interpretive matrix, Armstrong is able to transcend a false dichotomization of cognition and emotion: ‘For him, it is never that the viewer’s affect is caused by the artist’s sensibilities packed into work; it is that the viewer’s feelings are drenched in comprehension of enacted sensibilities that live in the work’ (Feld, 1988: 104). In the course of a myriad of presentations about the flight from *ɲotsie* by Anlo interlocutors, when I began mimetically to curl up myself, I believe that my feelings had finally become *drenched in comprehension of enacted sensibilities*.²⁵ Here I have tried to describe how beginning with ‘emplaced experiences’ in a land washing out to sea, there arose an attentiveness to *ɲotsie* as the center, and to Togbui Wenya’s never-ending and somatically expressed ‘*Nyeamea meɲlɔ* . . .’ which poetically and aesthetically captures a vital dimension of the condition of being Anlo in-the-world.

Coda

Throughout the article I have used a set of empirical terms to identify and describe *ɲlɔ*. I have claimed that it is a word, event, posture, state and concept. But the radical empiricism involved in phenomenological anthropology has beckoned me to work toward fleshing out intersubjective

dimensions of this word-posture-event. Here I have tried to celebrate the power of narrative, the word and the text (in Anlo worlds as well as in the world of anthropology), while simultaneously attempting to capture some of the sounds and sensations of *ɲɔ* in its lived immediacy. I have enlisted a set of analytic terms – scheme, symbol, institution, disposition, somatic modes of attention – as tools in this exploration and meditative display. Each of the various glosses was employed as a device to spotlight different facets of *ɲɔ*. And while the indeterminacy of *ɲɔ* is paramount, providing conditions of possibility in Anlo-Ewe fields, in the end I am left with the feeling of a timelessness, bodiliness and durability in *ɲɔ* reminiscent of how perception and consciousness are tied to a certain cultural world.

Phenomenology in ethnography asks that we deeply engage ‘the participatory side of fieldwork, the reflective dimension in theorizing, and the dialectic between the knowledge we construct of others and the knowledge they construct of themselves and of us’ (Jackson, 1989: x). We do not enter the field, after all, having left our bodies at home. For anthropologists and the people we consult or engage, relationships constitute (and are constituted by) the ethnographic project. We often find ourselves drenched – not just in discourse and words, but in sensations, imaginations and emotions. For many ethnographers, life in the field is nothing if not a full-bodied state. And yet, if we have become drenched, those we work with may also be soaked through and through. Such moments open up space, or sound a call, to body forth fine-tuned accounts replete with an ethical aesthetics of relationships in the field.

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for the invitation to attend and present. Pseudonyms and composite identities have been used in the text.

Notes

- 1 In English-language writings about the Anlo-Ewe, it is standard to spell their name using English characters – even though the ‘n’, ‘o’ and ‘w’ do not correspond to the phonemes used by Ewe-speakers themselves. This convention will be followed, by and large, throughout this article simply because alternative spellings are often confusing. However, it should be noted that currently, when writing about Ewe of certain Francophone areas of West Africa, their name is sometimes spelled Evhe (e.g. Blier, 1995). I raise this issue of typography because this article takes up issues revolving around the sound and feel of their name, and it therefore becomes important to represent the phonology as accurately as possible. When I write Anlo and/or Ewe in descriptive passages, I use the conventional (Roman alphabet) spelling. When I am focusing attention on the phonemic qualities of the name Anlo, I spell it as Anlɔ – using the nasal vowel ɔ (instead of ‘o’) and the consonant ‘ŋ’ (instead of ‘n’). The actual sound of the terms ‘Mɛŋlɔ’ and ‘ŋɔtsie’ are also significant to my argument, hence I employ the orthography that is typically used in transcribing Ewe words for these spellings in an effort to emphasize certain sonic issues.
- 2 Limiting this discussion to the geo-political boundary of Ghana is somewhat artificial, as it can be argued that Anlo-Ewe and Ewe people in general are also organized and active in civic affairs in many other parts of the world. For example, the Ewe Association in Chicago alone is made up of several thousand people. But this essay will confine itself to the role of Anlo-Ewe people in Ghana, and the diasporic ramifications of the claims I make here will be explored only briefly, leaving room for a sequel to this piece.
- 3 See Locke (1987: 4), for a discussion of the influence of Ewe music on American jazz, and how through a book by Gunther Schuller called *Early Jazz*, many Euro-American jazz musicians became aware of Ewe drumming.
- 4 Ethnomusicologist Daniel Avorgbedor recently informed me of an Agbadza song that expresses these precise sentiments. The words are: ‘Habɔ ee, Tema Habɔ ee, Habɔ yae mie ɔɔ, Tsie ɔe Keta, Habɔ ya mieɔɔ, Tsie ɔe Keta hoo’, which means ‘Tema Harbor, you’ve arrived, Water is taking Keta’.
- 5 This story is also an integral part of the Annual Festival held in Anloga each fall, called Hogbetsotso, which many people told me about. Hogbe or Hogbefe (place of origin) is another name for Notsie. Amenumey (1986: 2) lists a number of the different names used to refer to Notsie: Glime (within the walls), Kpome (alluding to the heat) and Hahome (near the river Haho).

- 6 Some of the written accounts include Amenumey (1986: 2–11), Fiawoo (1959: 27–38), Greene (1985: 74–6, 1996), Kodzo-Vordoagu (1994: 1–3), Locke (1978: 7–13). Most of these written accounts simply mention the meaning of ‘*menlo*’ in passing. For instance, in a document by the Anlo Traditional Council (1978: 12) it states that, ‘Wenya’s own party hit the Ewe coast at Atiteti and then traveled east by canoe to the site of Keta where it founded that town. Going westwards again overland, Tegbi and Woe were founded. By now Wenya had grown weak and feeble and had to be carried in a hammock. At one point he decided he would go no further – that his bones had become shrunken, that is, ‘*menlo*’ which gave the name ANLO to the settlement that was founded there.’ Locke wrote (1978: 11): ‘At Anloga, Wenya became cramped and tired, and declared that he could travel no further. Thus Anloga became the capital of the region and the people became known as the Anlo: literally, rolled up or cramped.’
- 7 Greene (1996) documents how this story has been used by different clans at various points in history in their efforts to become ‘ethnic insiders’ or to be included in the category of ‘Anlo’. Historically it is quite significant to note which clans actually came from Notsie and which ones ‘invented’ a history of tenure there, but these historical facts do not seem to affect the ‘embodied cultural memories’ that I am highlighting here. This is due in part to what Greene explains about the current status of ‘Anlo identity’ in relation to the place called Notsie:
- By the mid-twentieth century . . . the factors that had generated the permeable, yet still quite limiting, boundaries between ‘we’ and ‘they’ within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Anlo society had changed to the point where only a few groups were still defined as ‘other’ within this polity. The Anlo increasingly accepted as genuine fictive kinship ties between clan ancestors and recently invented connections to Notsie. (Greene, 1996: 8)
- 8 See Greene (2002), for a much more elaborate account of the cultural history and significance of the Notsie narrative.
- 9 While an oath was not sworn, there are other reasons to accept the notion of Notsie as a place with many sacred associations for the Anlo. For instance, see Nukunya’s (1969: 120–1) discussion of a powder made from the *eto* tree – a powder used to legalize marriages (in the past) and to conclude various other agreements. He explains that the original *eto* tree was at Hogbe or Notsie and was associated with one of the gods in that location. Then, ‘on their departure from Hogbe they brought with them branches of the tree, some of which can be seen to this day’. Other significant and sometimes sacred objects and traditions are clearly traced back to their time at Notsie. So the discussion in the text – concerning sworn oaths – is not meant to detract from the religious and philosophical ties between Anlo people and Notsie.

- 10 There is no precise equivalent in the English language for the Ewe phonemes ɔ or η in the words $\text{me}\eta\text{ɔ}$ or $\text{A}\eta\text{ɔ}$, so it is difficult to get English speakers to experience the sounds and sensations involved in these speech acts. In efforts to teach the Ewe language to English speakers, the ɔ is usually likened to the sound of the word ‘cost’ or ‘bought’, and the η is usually described as that of the word ‘sing’, but there are subtle qualitative differences between how these phonemes are spoken in the two different languages. (For pronunciation guidelines for Ewe, see the preface of Westermann, 1973; the Language Guide [Ewe Version] of the Bureau of Ghana Languages, pp. 7–8; or the beginning of Warburton et al.’s text, *Ewe Basic Course*, Indiana University African Studies Program.)
- 11 Along these lines, see Amoaku’s (1985: 38–9) discussion of how many Ewe ‘names reflect tonal verbalization of the sounds they produce’. He is referring mainly to a drum, *Adabatram*, and how its name means *Adabra* (insanity) + *tram* (astray) which represents the state of mind that the drumming of *Adabatram* creates. In addition, however, the sounds produced by this specific drum have a sonic similarity to the verbal utterance of *A-da-ba-tram*. I am suggesting a parallel concept for the terms $\text{A}\eta\text{ɔ}$ and ‘*Nyeamea me}\eta\text{ɔ} . . .*’.
- 12 See Geurts (2002b), for a more elaborate explanation of how lived experience in Anlo contexts is better understood through their own category of *seselelame* (feeling in the body), which privileges synesthetic modes of perception.
- 13 While I do not usually present proper nouns of the Ewe language in italics or using the correct orthography, I wanted to do it here so that it is clear that the $\eta\text{ɔ}$ I am discussing is the same $\eta\text{ɔ}$ as the root of each of these words.
- 14 I have compared notes with other researchers working in Anlo contexts, and they report that people have only rarely if ever spontaneously told them this story. Why so many individuals felt compelled to relate this tale to me is rather curious, and I have tried to trace the ways in which it may have stemmed from the issues and questions I raised in conducting research. I was (in the first instance) trying to ‘excavate’ their indigenous sensorium (or model of sensing), and I tried to ask questions about bodily and sensory experiences. I sometimes asked people to tell me stories or talk about proverbs that made specific reference to emotional and sensory states. But it was rarely in direct response (or as an explicit answer) to such a request that I was told this story. Instead, people often said they could not think of a story that illustrated something about the senses, but they felt I really should know their history, and then proceeded to tell me about $\eta\text{ɔtsie}$ and *Togbui Wenya*. Some individuals did expressly state that they wanted me to understand ‘how they had suffered’ (meaning their people), so it was told to me with the theme of emotion in mind. In addition, I heard the story most frequently right around the time of *Hogbetsotso* (their annual festival

commemorating the flight from ɲotsie). These dialogues occurred not specifically in relation to my own research, but rather in the course of everyday conversation during September and October (the festival is at the beginning of November), so the anticipation of Hogbetsotso would (at some level) account for the frequent telling of the tale at that time. However, in at least three instances (including the interview with the man I have called Mr Tamakloe), the person told me the migration story somewhat 'out of the blue'. That is to say, I had already conducted lengthy audio-taped interviews with these individuals, around numerous topics including the senses or *seselelame* (a term that translates roughly as 'feeling in the body' or more literally as feel-feel-at-flesh-inside). Then, without reference to *seselelame* or to emotion, these three individuals (in separate situations) simply stated that I needed to know this aspect of Anlo cultural history. It did not matter to them that I had already heard the story; each person felt I should be told the story again. In retrospect, it seems to me that they were intuiting a kind of association between *seselelame* and some of the themes of the story (including the 'suffering' mentioned above and perhaps even a kind of embodied consciousness that some Anlo emigrants in the US more readily discuss). It is in these ways that I have tried to 'trace' these connections – between the story and a more pervasive sensibility, between the bodily gesture mimicking Togbui Wenya and the sadness about their loss of land, the stereotyped attitudes about Anlo-Ewe people, etc. – and to pose questions about meaning and association more directly to a new set of people.

- 15 Setting off 'real' with quotations here is done not only because of reality's indeterminacy, but also in the spirit of acknowledging the notion of living 'reality as really made-up' (Taussig, 1993: 255).
- 16 See Csordas (1993: 147) for a more extensive discussion of these analytic categories (intuition, emotion, imagination, perception, sensation).
- 17 The relations between Anlo-land and her neighbors certainly need to be scrutinized historically to appreciate this problem. Amenumey, for example, states (1968: 99–100) that:

In the pre-colonial period Anlo had managed to make herself thoroughly hated by her immediate neighbors – some of whom were fellow Ewe people. Anlo had fought many battles with the Gen, a fellow Ewe subtribe to the east. The causes were attempts by either side to engross as much of the slave-trade as possible to the exclusion of the other, and also barefaced slave-raiding. Again there had been many conflicts between Anlo on the one hand and the people of Accra and Ada on the other. These were mostly due to a clash of economic interests, namely salt and fishing rights in the lagoon and along the river Volta.

The sources of the 'hate' noted by Amenumey, therefore, are complex and historically rooted. My description does not mean to discount the

complexity of how these relations have deep historical and economic bases, but rather to highlight how this aspect of their history has been ‘turned into nature’ (to use Bourdieu’s phrase).

- 18 Elvis Adikah related this anecdote in the same letter (20 December 2000) mentioned above.
- 19 ‘Intelligentsia’ is a term I heard used by numerous people – both Ewe and non-Ewe – to describe ‘the Anlo’. When I asked one prominent Anlo-Ewe scholar about this, he stated that Ghanaians have very peculiar ideas about the Anlo, talking about them as very inward and secretive, and his final comment was that ‘there are even rumors about a Dzelukoŋe mafia’.
- 20 Greene is not the only scholar to suggest there is ethnic tension and that some of it stems from an association of Ewes with *vodu*. For instance, Locke clearly states (1978: 34) that ‘The Ewe are noted among the ethnic groups of Ghana for the number and power of magic charms, commonly referred to in broken English as juju.’ In addition, in a separate part of this same work, Locke (1978: 23) recounts an historical anecdote about how the British could not enlist other ethnic groups to join them in attacking an Anlo camp. Locke then concludes with the remark ‘This episode seems to indicate the fear which other Africans had of the Anlo.’ Clearly, the issue of animosity along ethnic lines has a complex and deep history, and cannot be summed up simply by fear of *vodu*, but this discussion is aimed at exploring certain restricted dimensions of this problem.
- 21 The precise history of this story is unclear. While most people seem to think that Anlo people have been telling this story since they arrived at the area known as Keta and Anloga, it is also a story that has been used by groups to gain ‘insider’ status (see Greene, 1996).
- 22 While little seems to have been written about Notsie, and I am not aware of archaeological excavations having been conducted there, Amenumey does mention some details in his account of Ewe pre-colonial history.

As late as 1927, the walls of Notsie which has been ravaged by centuries of exposure still measured 5.2 metres in thickness and 1.8 metres in height. It was estimated that originally it must have been about 5.2 metres high and 8.5 metres wide. (Amenumey, 1986: 4)

- 23 For a discussion of why the principle of the obverse is significant in phenomenology, and does not represent a dichotomy, see Merleau-Ponty, (1969).
- 24 For much more extensive discussions of the verbal arts of West Africa, see Anyidoho (1983, 1985), Awoonor (1975), Ben-Amos (1975), Finnegan (1969, 1976), Okpewho (1979), Peek (1981, 1994) and Stoller (1989, 1997).
- 25 Carol Laderman (1994) writes eloquently of how anthropologists can take in symbolic meanings from other cultural contexts such that their

bodily-spiritual make-up is actually transformed. My claims about being 'drenched in comprehension' follow the same lines.

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