

Accountabilities, invisibilities and silences in a Danish Slave Trading Company on the Gold Coast in the early 18th century

Mads Langballe Jensen

Gloria Agyemang

Cheryl R Lehman

Accountabilities, invisibilities and silences in a Danish Slave Trading Company on the Gold Coast in the early 18th century

Abstract

Using eighteenth-century archival material from a Danish trading fort in West Africa, we explore how accounting and accountability systems were complicit with the crafting and narration of racialized slave trading during mercantile colonialism. By examining the role of accounting not at the slave trade's endpoint, e. g., plantations in the Americas, but at its *points of extraction*, we reveal the role of accounting in commodifying and dehumanizing human beings at a "point of no return". We add to research that exposes the accounting practices that made humans visible as articles for trade while rendering invisible the innate, human qualities of enslaved Africans. The slave trade relied on methods of physical domination and threats of violence, and we discover these are also part of the accounting portrayed in the archive materials. Given the complex and intricate social relations of the time, we reveal how the mechanisms that attempted to establish accountability between conflicting constituencies (kingdoms, investors, merchants, etc.) were ultimately unstable and challenged but very much focussed on ensuring profit from the trade. Chartered slave trading companies produced sanitized classification schemes in which accounting played a central role in reporting the commerce of enslaved Africans as just another commodity traded under legitimated violence. Issues of racialization and violence continue in this century, thus there remains an important role for accounting researchers to engage with these issues of injustice.

Keywords: Accountability; slave trade; colonialism; racialized accounts; mercantile capitalism

1. Introduction

Through this research, we aim to expand our understanding of the role of accountability in the slave trade.¹ As we study accounting and accountability processes in slave trading, we draw upon critical accounting perspectives to demonstrate how people are rendered as commodities. We reveal how accounting practices created meaning and led to the subjugation of people in Danish slave trading in the eighteenth-century. We show how accounting constructs both visibilities and invisibilities of humans. We contribute to accounting scholarship that disputes "value-free" accounting techniques in the slave trade (c.f. Annisette, 2009) and those that recognize the role of accounting in racialization, colonialism and inequities (Annisette and Prasad, 2017; Annisette and Trivedi, 2013; Harney, 2011; Alawattage and Fernando, 2017; Perkiss et. al., 2012; Sinclair, 1995). Our use of data from eighteenth-century slave accounts is intended not as an intellectual nicety but to help us understand past relationships of power and inequality and thereby further our understandings of contemporary accounting and social justice issues. We contribute to the arguments by Annisette and Prasad (2017) that issues of violence and race have not

¹ Using the recognized term.

disappeared in the present century and remain important issues for accounting researchers to engage with regarding injustices.

Using archives from a trading fort on the so-called Gold Coast of West Africa,² we aim to clarify how accounting and accountability systems were integral to the crafting and narrating of racialized slave trading. In chronicling accounting techniques and relationships in early Danish mercantile colonialism, we illustrate Lowe and Puxty's (1990) perception of accounting as located in particular contexts – in this case, helping to conceal the brutality of the slave trade. As such, we agree with critical accounting research that dismisses the separation of the social and economic, the dichotomies of private versus public and the separation of the legal and moral. Taking an account manifests in particular ways (Mennicken, 2013; Hansen and Muhlen-Schulte, 2012), and we focus on how accounting systems are deeply involved in shaping subjects and social relationships in eighteenth-century mercantile capitalism.

Earlier research on the role of accounting and accountability in the slave trade includes the work of Pinto and West (2017a, 2017b), exploring accounting records of a Portuguese slave trading company and an extensive series of articles by Fleischman, Oldroyd, and Tyson assessing accounting's role in the organisation of plantation slavery and in the transition to free labour (Fleischman et al., 2004, 2011a, 2011b; Oldroyd et al., 2008; Tyson et al., 2005). Dehumanisation of enslaved Africans, reflecting racist attitudes in the British West Indies and Southern US has been explored by Anisette (2009) and others (Anisette and Prasad, 2017). Carmona, Donoso and Walker (2010) in their work on the role of accounting in the enforcement of the Asiento-treaty, illustrate how the British South Sea Company traded slaves to Spanish American possessions (Anes, 2002; Carmona et al., 2010).

Our work differs from and contributes to the critical accounting slave trade literature in two aspects. First, our study examines the role of accounting not at the endpoint of the slave trade, e.g., plantations in the Americas, but at *its points of extraction*: at the Gold Coast. This was perhaps where accounting's commodifying and dehumanizing role was at its starkest: a "point of no return" where human beings were irrevocably accounted for as marketable property before being shipped across the Atlantic. We focus on the early eighteenth century, a period of intensive growth in the slave trade when such commerce was generally viewed as legitimate by both European and African societies. Our specific case examines a slave trading fort, Fort Christiansborg, near Accra, and the governors' (particularly Governor Boye, 1711-1717) responsibilities for providing accounts to the king of Denmark, to Danish company directors, and to investors. Studying this early phase allows us to witness the trajectories of practices and, due to inevitable instabilities in social practice, we observe the evolution of accounting systems.

A second intended contribution is to add to research that exposes accounting's attempts at commodifying persons and, in this sense, making humans visible as articles for trade while

² Roughly present-day Ghana, on the west coast of Africa.

rendering invisible the innate, human qualities of enslaved Africans. Practices such as accounting present the story of the slave trade in seemingly neutral texts, mechanisms, and exclusions. As such, our data displays the capacity of accounting to create visibilities and invisibilities, producing “symbolic violence to legitimise the reproduction of asymmetrical positions of power by shaping what is consensual . . . and devices perceived as objective” (Farjaudon and Morales, 2013, p. 154). The archives of the Danish Slave Trade contain accountability reports designed by and for numerous participants with power and control, attempting to exclude the personhoods of those enslaved. Focusing on an early phase of the slave trade allows us to follow attempts at constructing systems of accountability to facilitate the inhumane trade, and we reveal the challenges and power struggles the systems were designed to control. We have, moreover, chosen a case study in which the ordinary mechanism of such systems “failed” and extraordinary measures were taken (including a lawsuit). This led to the activation of additional mechanisms of accountability and the generation of supplementary sources, which further illuminate conflicts at play and reveal what is rendered visible and invisible. As slave trading relied on methods of domination based on physical armed force and threats of violence, we reveal these too are part of the accounting within archive materials. Exploring numerous mercantile trade strategies of accountability, concealment and legitimation, we ultimately show social injustices were sanitized in reports and texts while threats of violence and actual physical violence were underplayed.

We return to these themes, expanding on them in our framework and revealing how they manifest in the archival material. Recognizing that the dynamics of inequity and dominance are fundamental to the slave trade, we suggest that suppression and subjugation are concealed in banal and seemingly ordinary agent-principal and accountability designs.³ As such, the paper illustrates the struggle over profits and power evidenced in social structures and institutional accountability practices.

The paper consists of five additional sections. Section 2 sets out our framework for understanding the dynamics of the slave trade and accounting. In this section, we review accounting literature, recognizing the importance of racialized accounts, and we investigate accounting practices prevalent in mercantile capitalism, including ideas regarding relationships of power. Section 3 explains our research methods. Section 4 examines the systems and structures of accountability. Section 5 assesses the investigation of, and legal case against, Governor Boye and provides more detail of accountabilities that were privileged. Finally, section 6 presents our discussion and conclusions.

Section 2. Background Literature

Our analysis of the practices that produced subjugation during the Danish slave trade is informed by the accounting literature on colonialism, processes of racialization and the literature of accountability. Notably, Annisette and Prasad (2017) regard early race thinking as emerging “to reconcile the contradictions between the universal humanism claims of Enlightenment thought and the inequalities enshrined by systems of colonialism”

³ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for making this salient point.

(p. 7). Constructing races and demarcating between them was imperative in the case of colonialism and included codifying the colonizer and the colonized into different spheres of humankind, allowing for the policing of imperial rule (Annisette and Prasad 2017). Race becomes embedded in state, economies, class, imperialist and political conflicts, and practices. Accounting practices are employed to construct and maintain such codifications within these conflicts.

Racialized accounts have been studied in societies deeply structured by race.⁴ Many of these societies are shaped by the legacy of colonialism and racial exploitation of labour. “These studies serve to illustrate how accounting practices themselves can become racialized and so serve to (re)produce race and differentially distribute material and other rewards on the basis of racial assignment” (Annisette and Prasad, 2017, p. 10), exposing the involvement of accounting in social construction. Central to our work is Annisette and Prasad’s affirmation that “Accounting becomes an eminently suitable technology to manage and enact violence on racialized populations because of its capacity to de-humanize them or render them invisible as people” (p. 9).

Araújo et al. (2017) also communicate the enduring conflicts in mercantile commerce. They argue that the several roles of accounting in the governance of society “were important to the Portuguese state’s overall purpose of ‘rebuilding sovereignty’ (i.e., rebuilding a powerful state)” (Araújo et al, 2017, p. 42). Their work illustrates that accounting in the eighteenth century was part of knowledge employed “to help the Portuguese Empire in its desire to return to its former strength and glory. . . . Accounting’s distributive role involves ‘measuring and rationalising power relationships’ . . . by inculcating technologies . . . that would provide wealth and performance measures for (and demarcate power relationships between) government, the mercantile community, and the general populace” (Araújo et al, 2017, p. 42). As we shall see, similar processes were at play in the Danish slave trade.

Accounting conveyed distant knowledge to centres of calculation and helped to sustain colonialism and its logic in Brazilian trade. Araújo et al, 2017 argued that “accounting articulated . . . power-knowledge discourses to strengthen the State (Araújo et al, 2017, p. 42) and accounting was significant in shaping and normalizing conduct and decisions for achieving desired objectives. Brazilian cities established schools of commerce in the eighteenth century as part of the rapidly growing mercantile class “with a virtual lock on political power, the economy, and social prestige” (Araújo et al, 2017, p. 49). Similarly, in the case of Fort Christiansborg, we shall see how the governors were part of this entitled class such that when governors, including Boye, potentially contradicted the norms of mercantile standards of behaviour, they were removed from such privileged positions.

⁴ Race is socially constructed and in this regard, Annisette and Prasad (2017) suggest critical accounting researchers can use a strategic essentialism for conceptual trajectories to understand race while “at the same time, using race as an analytical category—in a way that ultimately confounds its ontological assumptions” (p.17). Thus as critical scholars, race categories are described ultimately to subvert them.

So too, Bakre (2008) reveals the importance of accounting in achieving the objectives of colonialism, including generating the colonizer's own 'software' and 'hardware': "Financial reporting knowledge and calculations became the 'software' of imperialism, which further aided the development of the 'hardware' such as steam gunboats, ammunition, slave ships and guns, for both the military and mercantile purposes . . . [and] directly aided the colonisation of the colony of Jamaica" (p. 506). Bakre describes details of the processes of colonization through which "the primary objectives of the soft and hardware of imperialism were to aid the appropriation, accumulation and the enlargement of capitalism⁵ for the colonialists and their respective capitalists" (p. 517), formulating this as legitimate activities in purportedly neutral language in financial reports.

Recognizing critical accounting's contribution to interweaving colonial histories and accounting, Alawattage and Fernando (2017) expand the research into the cultural agency of the colonized and how such agency is central to reproducing accounting practices in postcolonial⁶ social spaces. As we do in our work, Alawattage and Fernando (2017) explore the interplay between the processes of reinterpretation and negotiation, while addressing how accounting utterances bring together local practices. "The cultural agency of the colonized becomes a complex assemblage of desire, power, and enunciation where self and the world are interrelatedly enacted through materially engaged textual practices" (Alawattage and Fernando 2017, p. 2). They indicate that one way of studying imperialism and post colonialism in accounting is from the colonizer's perspective (but not necessarily taking their side) and show how the dominating metropolitan centre governs. This is relevant to our study since accounting is viewed as part of the expanding empire's institutional apparatuses. In contrast, approaching postcoloniality from the perspective of the colonized focuses on how they react to and reconstruct imperial discourses and is an important aspect of their work. It describes postcolonial subjectivities as being reconstructed through cultural-political encounters between the colonized and the colonizer. This is a particularly significant assessment for our work, given that the Danish archives communicate little of what might be called 'human engagement' with the enslaved or colonized. The notion that the colonizer and colonized are offered new possibilities of creating views of 'the self' and 'the other' is not evident in the Danish texts and reports. Rather, the accounts present Africans to be captured for material capital stock, yet engaging with tribal kingships because this was necessary for procurement of slaves. Rarely is agency attributed to the enslaved Africans.

However, agency and accountability are indeed found in the archives between multiple privileged constituencies and power holders. These include, for example, between the Danish governors (in particular Boye), the king of Akwamu (an indigenous kingship), and

⁵ Relevant to our aims, Bakre (2008) notes that "accounting has also become the tool of the acclaimed globalization. In this context, accounting continues to be used as an instrument of influencing, displacing and exploiting many developing countries' entrepreneurial, intellectual and even government programmes and policies" (p. 517).

⁶ Alawattage and Fernando (2017) note that defining postcolonial is complicated by its prefix "post" which ordinarily implies "after" in two senses: temporal (afterwards) and discursive, as in supplanting. "Temporally, it carries a political-economic status: postcolonial means formally independent from colonial rule, which can coexist with being neocolonial (still economically or culturally dependent on imperial centres)" (p. 2). In their paper they describe discursive conditions reproducing postcolonial dependencies and dominations.

local traders. As we will seek to show, issues of accountability enable understanding of the complexities of relationships associated with the slave trade.

The work of Bovens (2010) and Roberts and Scapens (1985) guide our analysis of accountability, in connecting complex and dynamic relationships.⁷ Bovens scrutinizes multiple meanings of accountability, distinguishing between accountability as a *virtue* and as a *mechanism* (Bovens, 2010). Accountability as a virtue is normative behaviour and therefore difficult to define because it is an “essentially contested” concept with standards depending on “role, institutional context, era, and political perspective” (Bovens, 2010, p. 949). Accountability as a mechanism is the institutional or social relationship by which one agent is held accountable by another agent (Bovens, 2010, p. 948). As a formal definition it is “a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences” (Bovens, 2010, p. 951). For Bovens, accountability involves relationships of power, evident in that consequences – including the power to punish or reward behaviour – are specified.

Roberts and Scapens argue that accounting systems interact and should be analysed as the products of power struggles, rather than as existing systems with determined actions of actors. Central to their argument is the focus on “systems of accountability” as something embodied in practice (Roberts and Scapens, 1985, p. 447) and, as such, both a locus and a resource for the power struggles of different actors in these systems. Roberts and Scapens argue that the actors utilize and reproduce structures of Signification (meaning), Legitimation (morality) and Domination (power) (Roberts and Scapens, 1985, p. 448). Accounting’s distinctive universe of meaning, then, legitimizes certain social relationships, institutionalising the rights of some to hold others to account with corresponding obligations. This constitutes a relationship of domination abetted by resources that superiors can draw upon to make inferiors comply. Roberts and Scapens also suggest contingencies whereby *some* inferiors can resist the power of their superiors in various ways, particularly under capitalism with its separation of ownership and management. *Some* subordinates can exploit their superiors’ lack of detailed knowledge and “conceal, distort or dress the information which he or she channels through the system” (Roberts and Scapens, 1985, p. 449). Relationships of accountability constituted over long distances can afford opportunities for certain subordinates to resist their superiors, and we shall see this at play in the case study we provide.

Our study confirms the primacy of the accumulation of power and profits in mercantile accountability systems. While there is an abundance of disclosure in minutes, reports and testimonies, as we shall see, persons traded are visible only as commodities and only under extraordinary circumstances as human beings. To bring these frameworks together, our

⁷ Historical and critical study of accountability practices in the slave trade require coping with historical sensitivity and unsettledness in defining accountability. The investigation embraces a spectrum of meanings ranging from bookkeeping (the focus of Fleischman et al. as well as Carmona et al.) to the encompassing notion of accountability as “the giving and demanding of reasons for conduct” (Roberts and Scapens, 1985, p. 447). Where an exclusive focus on the former prevents a full understanding of the role of organizational accountability in the slave trade, the latter opens the door to a bewildering multiplicity of understandings of accountability.

view is that colonial commerce is neither a private nor a personal enterprise but operates in the overlap of state functioning where accountability is linked to virtue and mechanism in two potentially interrelated ways. As discussed above, the first is hardware or armed power exerted by the Danish kingdom and local kingdoms, enabling seizure, domination and subjugation based on race and tribe. In this sense, colonial companies with royal charters were in part military structures, in part civic and commercial functions considered legitimate. The second is software, including accounting, that documents and as such confers legitimacy for the use of the hardware. Substantial investment in military capacity was required for domination under colonization, and the accounting practices made such investment and domination possible.

Accountability functioned to make this accumulation of profit possible, and in the process, certain Africans were transformed into mere “trading stocks” while others (kings, leaders, and traders) entered into partnerships with Europeans (who, while trading with them, conspicuously considered them subordinate or in need of subjection, as we shall see). Profit (and the power to obtain it) is the key objective of mercantile capitalism, and we highlight how this was legitimised in the archives. Domination takes place with the representation of people, tribes, Europeans and trading “allies” who subscribe to their virtues in order to benefit from certain forms of profits. This becomes complex and fascinating to observe, as we shall see when certain mercantile profiteering (a governor’s “private accumulation”) transgresses “virtue” and when different countries operating on the periphery clash for profits. As is inevitable in the domain of social relationships – given the compromises and antagonisms between actors like chartered companies, investors, managers, governors, governed, allies, and enemies – accountability is murky. Such instabilities and antagonisms challenge different, competing virtues (e.g., the wealth of the state or national versus private wealth). As such, we reveal mechanisms of accountability as necessarily fluid, and we track the way that particular virtues are temporarily stabilized or changed – they may dominate or become subordinate. Trading in persons as slaves had been “standard” practice in many eras and many cultures. We show how accounting and accountability contributed to creating this standard, drawing upon the work above, which notes that the humanity of enslaved constituencies was silenced in the process; perhaps – as noted by Annisette and Prasad (2017) – as a necessary condition “to reconcile the contradictions between the universal humanism claims of Enlightenment thought and the inequalities enshrined by systems of colonialism” (p. 7).

How were accountability mechanisms employed in organizing the slave trade as part of mercantile capitalism? Which power relationships are visible and privileged and which are rendered invisible? In the next section, we begin the exploration by outlining the case and our data.

Section 3. Research methods and archives

Our work analyses records held at the National Archives in Copenhagen of the Danish West India and Guinea Company (DWIGC; referred to also as the Company), a slave-trading

company on the Gold Coast, in the eighteenth century.⁸ The paper takes a predominantly empirical and open-ended approach (Sinclair, 1995). We identified a case that could be especially illustrative of how accountability processes worked in the Danish slave trade: the governorship of Frantz Boye at the company fort *Christiansborg* near Accra (18 August 1711 to 26 November 1717). Both the company and the governor faced multiple accountability issues. The Governor Boye case is particularly illustrative as it resulted in enforcement mechanisms on account of accusations of mismanagement, thus producing extraordinary archival sources (e.g., the protocol of a legal investigation). A range of these archival sources are analysed, including letters sent between Christiansborg and Copenhagen, account books, trade ledgers and cash books, the company charter, instructions sent to the governor, and the court protocol.

To set the scene, around 1700, the DWIGC was responsible for governing the Danish West Indian colonies⁹ as well as maintaining the Danish fortifications established on the Gold Coast to protect the gold trade and the supply of slaves to plantations in the Danish colonies (Hernæs, 1998, pp. 194ff). The Danish presence was limited to the eastern Gold Coast with headquarters at Fort Christiansborg at Osu near Accra. Danes competed with other Europeans for trade in slaves, gold and food supplies. European relationships were characterized by uneasy collaboration, descending at times to outright hostility, and rendering friendly relations with local tribes and kingdoms essential. Danes formed close relationships with the local Ga people living at Osu below Christiansborg, whose leaders, *caboceers*, acted as middlemen, merchant brokers and negotiators when trading with local merchants from inland. The Danes also had to maintain good relations to the larger inland Empire of Akwamu, which claimed sovereignty over the Accra area.¹⁰

We analyse the archival sources in two sections. The first analysis, in Section 4, explains the accountability systems and structures used and maintained under Danish colonialism and slave trade while the second analysis, in Section 5, discusses the lawsuit against Governor Boye. Thus, Section 4 explores mercantilist forms of creating through accounting visibilities, invisibilities, mechanisms, virtues and, in the words of Roberts and Scapens, signification (meaning), legitimation (morality) and domination (power). These practices, ensuring company presence and a steady supply of enslaved people, necessitated accountability relationships with local communities and rulers. As manifested in the company charter, we describe these representations of rulings and impositions on external and internal accountability. We describe the details of mechanisms aimed at controlling agents in the field, requiring contracts of employment, sets of instructions, account books

⁸ Due to the bureaucratic nature of the Danish absolutist monarchy, sources available on the Danish Company are extensive (though not without holes), providing valuable information on the Company and its possessions in the West Indies and the Gold Coast, as well as on West African history more generally (Reindorf, 1980; Gøbel, 2002, 2015). A selection of these sources has now been edited and translated into English (Justesen, 2005).

⁹ Today the US Virgin Islands.

¹⁰ Initially (until the late 1600s) the Gold Coast was a *net-importer* of slaves, as gold was the primary commodity sought by Europeans. Two centuries of Euro-African trade resulted in the sale of enslaved Africans eclipsing the trade of gold, with disruptive effects on social, economic and political relations on the coast (Shumway, 2011, p. 25; cf. Hernæs, 1998). Shumway (2011) and others observe this meant that when the Transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans started to fully engulf the Gold Coast, Africans (as well as Europeans) could draw on established patterns of commerce for controlling trade in captured human beings.

and correspondence with directors. Military presence and threats of violence are also displayed in the accounts as necessary in alliances with conflicting constituencies: Europeans, local tribes and kingdoms such as the aforementioned local Ga people in Osu, the *caboceer* middlemen, merchant brokers, local merchants, and the Empire of Akwamu, claiming sovereignty over the Accra area. We see at play the forcible removal of indigenous populations in racialized processes where mercantilism was unstable and contested, and standards depended on “role, institutional context, era, and political perspective” (Bovens, 2010, p. 949).

The second aspect of our analysis (Section 5) is a discussion of the lawsuit against Governor Boye. With its extraordinary sources, the suit allows us to investigate what was revealed and concealed, included and excluded in the normal practices of accountability of that time. A pertinent example is the sudden visibility of the otherwise excluded slaves and the violent treatment they endured as they were commoditised and traded for profit. The perspectives of the literature in Section 2 are illustrated in the accounts along with contradictions and challenges entailed in the trade.

Section 4: Assessing and interpreting the meanings of systems and structures within accountability relationships

4.1. Establishing institutions and governance: reproducing capital under mercantilism

The governance of slave trading companies was codified in their charters which defined external and internal organizational accountability relationships. The DWIGC had initially been set up on the initiative of Dutch traders dissatisfied with being excluded from the Dutch West India Company (Nørregård, 1966). The company received its first charter in 1671 as the Danish West India Company. After the company was granted responsibility for the Africa trade and the monopoly on it, a new charter was issued for the new Danish West India and Guinea Company in 1697 (translated in Westergaard, 1917¹¹). The new charter determined the responsibilities and rights, organizational structure and accountability relations of the company. The company was given possession of Fort Christiansborg and permission to take possession of other forts and unoccupied land along with the right to enter into contracts and alliances with “governments in Africa [. . .] as seems best for the furtherance of commerce”, but not with other European powers without prior consent from the Danish king (Westergaard, 1917, pp. 299–302). The company brought together diverse interests, consisting of large capital investors including the Danish crown. Politically, it was intended as an instrument to increase state power “by serving as an engine of economic growth” and a “means to mobilise, concentrate and direct merchant capital” (Hernæs, 1998, p. 236). Overall the company was mercantilist (or early-capitalist), supplying gold and ivory to Denmark and slaves to the West Indian colonies, and increasing commerce and thereby the wealth of the country. The primary purpose of the company’s activities on the Gold Coast remained the pursuit of profit for the Crown and shareholders,

11 A modern edition is published in Feldbæk, 1986.

whether directly by trading there or indirectly through supplying enslaved Africans for the West Indian plantations.¹²

To reconcile conflicting interests, the company charter contained structures to specify accountability internally and externally. The DWIGC was managed by a board of directors accountable to company shareholders and the Danish government. The charter stipulated that two-thirds of the board of directors should be “reputable merchants” from Copenhagen and that a director had to invest at least 1,000 *rigsdaler* in the Company.¹³ One-third of the directors were required to be the King’s ministers. The board of directors was granted “full power and authority to dispose of all the Company’s means and effects, in Europe as well as in Africa and America, and to make all needful arrangements upon the Company’s behalf” (Westergaard, 1917, pp. 301). Directors were authorized to appoint and dismiss all Company employees, issue instructions to them, and punish or reward them accordingly. To this end, the company was permitted to have its own court, which could try all cases of employees who had not “rendered proper account of their stewardship” (Westergaard, 1917, p. 301). The language of abstraction (silencing) and power (control, hierarchy) were put in place to secure the primary purposes of profit and power. To ensure the Company was run in the governmental interest it was stipulated that a third of the directors were the King’s ministers, sharing in the “full power and authority to dispose of all the Company’s means and effects”. Bovens’s accountability as a mechanism of virtue is embodied in the period’s pursuit of commercial dominance and power for Denmark in the transatlantic trade where people are commodified. Drawing on Roberts and Scapens’ (1985) framing suggests the process of creating meaning (signification) resides in order and with rules that appear to be legitimate, yet intended for domination in trade and dominance over people (Alawattage and Fernando, 2017; Bakre, 2008). In this racialized capturing of Africans, the process of commerce rendered them visible for their commodification while occluding the violence on their persons (Annisette and Prasad, 2017).

4.2. Minutiae of Accountability Mechanism in the principal-agent relationships

Like other companies trading slaves on the coast, the DWIGC created directives, rules, and systems of documentation to hold the governor and other agents accountable through the minutiae of record-keeping while stationed on the coast.¹⁴ Accountability mechanisms put in place as a means of controlling agents on the African coast required – and were constituted by – contracts of employment, sets of instructions, account books at the fort and correspondence with the directors. Governor Frantz Boye is a case in point.

12 For the chartered company as an early example of an MNE, see Carlos and Nicholas, 1988, and for a different view, Jones and Ville 1996.

13 “Rigsdaler” (1 “Rdl.” = 6 “mark” = 96 “skilling”), often anglicized as *Rixdollar*, was the currency at the time. It’s worth and purchasing power in today’s currency is difficult to assess. In 1714 one pound sterling was equal to about 4,7 rigsdaler (Justesen, 2005, p. xxif).

14 For an analysis of the mechanisms set up by the English RAC to deal with the “agency problem”, see Carlos, 1994; Henige, 1980.

Frantz Boye was governor of the DWIGC's Fort Christiansborg from 18 August 1711 to 26 November 1717 (Justesen, 2005, p. 234; Reindorf, 1980, p. 135). Arriving as a common soldier around 1700, he was subsequently promoted to assistant, accountant ("bogholder"), and merchant (Justesen, 2005, pp. 200, 206, 208).¹⁵ Boye strove to achieve social prestige (cf. Araújo et al., 2017) becoming a middle manager of sorts, creating a career and power for himself through his knowledge of local languages and contacts on the African coast and in Europe. His eventual removal, in 1717, was due to accusations of maladministration and of having failed in his accountability to the DWIGC in Copenhagen. Boye's case allows us to observe the myth of accounting objectivity in a particular slave-trading relationship, providing an instance of how enslavement, violence and death occurred and were presented as a normalized and sanitized process rather than a violation of people.

Among the conditions of Boye's contract of employment was his promise to obey a detailed set of *Instructions for the governor and secret council at Christiansborg in Guinea*, to be in force until further notice and read and signed every four years (VgK 23, pp. 269–292). The governor was accountable, first, to the king of Denmark and, second (and more directly), to the directors of the Company (§§1-3). All other company employees at the fort were accountable to the governor. This hierarchical accountability (in Bovens's terminology) was of a principal-agent kind. Boye was obligated to explain and justify his conduct with accounts and letters sent home, which the directors would scrutinize and question.

An added level of assessment was the requirement that the governor should govern in conjunction with the "secret council": a governing council, consisting of the governor, the merchant, the accountant, and two assistants.¹⁶ This council should convene every day or as often as the affairs of the fort required. To ensure good governance, the *Instructions* stipulated that neither the governor nor the council was to undertake anything major without conferring with one another and that decisions were to be made by majority vote (§§5-6).

The priority of commerce was to obtain slaves. The governor and council were obliged to ensure that "as many good, healthy and fitting slaves as possible" were ready to be shipped out whenever a Danish ship arrived at the coast or sought to buy them when the ship had arrived (§8). Secondly, the commodities sent out to Christiansborg with these ships were to be traded for gold, ivory and other local commodities that could be brought home on the "slave ships". The ships should not leave the coast with less than 300 slaves, and if necessary were required to sail down to the Slave Coast to supplement the supply of slaves.

To ensure the accountability of the governor to the directors and that he fulfilled his responsibilities, the *Instructions* put two further mechanisms in place. First, a duty to report to the directors regularly through keeping a journal covering all commerce, general

¹⁵ Boye was initially dismissed over disagreements with the previous governor, Lygaard, and sent home in 1710, only to return to take up the position of governor in 1711.

¹⁶ Translations from the archival sources, unless quoted from Justesen, 2005, or Westergaard, 1917, are our own. The Danish term "Secrete Raad" is directly translated to "secret council", akin perhaps, to the English "privy council". However, as the role of the council is more aptly captured by the term "governing council" in contemporary English, this will be used henceforth.

accounts, a storage inventory and an expenses book, as well as a list of all company employees and their wages. Governors also had to keep a protocol on all remarkable events and any legal cases at the fort. The governor and governing council had to write to the directors, with all ships bound for Europe, sending the books and accounts and informing them of recent events and commerce (§16). Second, the charter and instructions spelt out the reward and consequences a governor could face for successes or failures in his duties (thus illustrating Bovens's argument that rewards and sanctions are integral to accountability relations). A governor could be rewarded with a percentage of the profits and his term could be renewed on better terms for successfully undertaking the required duties. Should he be assessed as having failed to meet the accountability requirements, he could be sanctioned with legal proceedings initiated against him resulting in his dismissal and a demand for reparations.

To demonstrate the required accountability, Boye sent home two forms of accounts: account books and ledgers, and narrative letters in which he accounted for his activities at the fort.¹⁷ The account books recorded Boye's management of company resources and commerce, whilst the letters justified his actions by giving an account of the challenges he faced. Where the accounts thus give a quantitative analysis of the state of commerce, the letters provide a narrative recounting of the overall conditions: commercial, social, political, military and otherwise. The letters are more important in giving reasons for success or failure in trade and describing how he sought to overcome his challenges.¹⁸

A constant challenge for trade at Christiansborg was the lack of ships from Denmark to the Gold Coast: only one Danish ship arrived during Boye's first four years as governor, in early 1714.¹⁹ To deal with this Boye decided to act as a middleman in trade between ships from other European countries and the local African traders. This role required fresh and desirable stocks of commodities. As he explained in a letter dated 29 April 1712 (Justesen, 2005, p. 238), after duly consulting the Governing Council in accordance with the *Instructions*, he therefore decided to buy goods to sell from a Dutch interloper and English "ten percenters". On Boye's account, this was a fruitful strategy, as he reported a total of 1,845 rdl. in profit from this with an additional 700 rdl. from buying slaves and selling them to European ships.²⁰

In October 1714, Boye and the Governing Council decided to buy the cargo of a wrecked English interloper and resell it.²¹ This purchase was recorded in the trade journal and it showed a long list of goods (such as iron, brass pans, and guns, as well as various items of European and Asian clothing), including a total of 195 slaves: "84 pieces [stk.] men slaves,

17 VGK 121. Most of these letters have been edited and translated (but many in excerpt) in (Justesen, 2005).

18 In this connection it is also relevant to point to the importance of letter writing as an integral part of accounting, as emphasized by Oldroyd: "The letters, however, were a more timely information source than the account books, more useful to merchants in managing their businesses distance [than ledgers]". "The letters promoted accountability and control by recording stewardship, conveying instructions, remitting cash, confirming balances, generating prime data for the account books, and providing legal evidence", (Oldroyd, 1998, pp. 61-2) also (Oldroyd and Dobie, 2009, p. 105)

19 Letter of 01.11.1715 (Justesen, 2005, p. 254).

20 Letter of 29.4.1712 (Justesen, 2005, p. 238).

21 Letter of 30.10.1714 (Justesen, 2005, p. 251f)

37 pcs. Women, 63 boys and 11 girls at 32 rdl. is [. . .] 6,240 rdl.” The purchase was recorded as totalling 10,617 rdl., 5 marks, and 10 shillings. As such, the slaves accounted for more than half the total value of the cargo (VgK 914-915, p. 108.). These slaves were simultaneously entered on double page 77 of the ledger (VgK 894). This page records the “debit” and “credit” of slaves between July 1714 and March 1715 and presents a particularly eventful picture. Under 8 October 1714, the ledger records the purchase of the 195 slaves from the English interloper, summarily recording the fates of some of them on the opposing page. While some sales are recorded, the most frequent entry is of a slave being listed as “dead” – 50 in total (although more slaves in total were listed as sold, and two as escaped). There is no account of how the unfortunate victims died: they are in this way invisible and unseen.

While the directors could exercise power over the governor through the requirement to report to the directors, the governor had some means of resisting this power, given the long distance between Copenhagen and the Coast, and the resulting capacity of the actor to distort or conceal information (Roberts and Scapens, 1985, pp. 452f).²² Thus Boye could avail himself of an asymmetry of information. Boye possessed more information about conditions than the directors, who had to rely on him. For instance, the directors were advised that on the Coast, English flintlock rifles were preferred to Danish, and that rum from the English West Indies was preferred to Danish brandy.²³ The governor’s knowledge of local affairs and his relations with trading partners enabled the company’s investors in Denmark and the Danish monarchy to conduct an Atlantic trade for gold, ivory and slaves which would otherwise have been impossible. At the same time, these conditions offered an opportunity for governors, such as Boye, to amass significant wealth for themselves and the company, and to maintain control.²⁴

Company employees like Boye were part of the normative social practice of individual wealth enrichment, going to the Gold Coast for adventure, profit and social advancement. Accumulating wealth was an accepted and ubiquitous ideology pervading these documents of mercantile capitalism. Investors, company officers and individuals engaged in weighing risks (e.g., ship-wrecking and piracy) in order to secure affluence and power.

Mercantile capitalism did not, as shown above, operate without inevitable conflicting interests between constituencies with power differentials, and these are represented in the voluminous attempts at checks and balances. Documentation included prioritizing commerce in slaves and that “as many good, healthy and fitting slaves as possible” were ready to be shipped (*Instructions* §8). Here we see the violent abstraction of accounting embodying impersonal justifications in human trade. The commodification of persons in

22 The journey of a ship from the Gold Coast via the West Indies to Denmark would take around 18 months, from Denmark to the Gold Coast another 4 months (Justesen, 2005, p. X, footnote 11).

23 Letter of 28.2.1713 (Justesen, 2005, p. 242).

24 On 10.5.1716 Boye reported to have made profits of more than 10,000 rdl. by selling slaves to ships with the prospect of earning another 1,000 rdl. in a few days. He also reported cash holdings of more than twenty-seven pounds of gold and 16,400 pounds of ivory at the end of April, amounting to 6,550 rdl. in gold and 17,070 pounds of ivory at the end of May. Letters of 10.5.1716 and 19.6.1716 (Justesen, 2005, p. 257), Boye did not specify what these goods were, but they would presumably have been the usual goods with which the Europeans bought slaves and gold.

trade is mundanely discussed, with accountability emphasizing agency to power holders, and profit-maximizing strategies are accentuated. Trading in slaves is articulated as an accepted activity with reports assuming objective characteristics of governance. A form of silencing is enacted, and as such we see that “accounting becomes an eminently suitable technology to manage and enact violence on racialized populations because of its capacity to de-humanize them or render them invisible as people” (Annisette and Prasad, 2017, p. 9).

4.3 Maintaining “accountability relationships” with the local people

Maintaining the Company’s slave trade also necessitated ensuring profitable relations with local African communities including the Ga people at Accra on the coast and the Akwamu Empire in the hinterland. Here we see the interplay between processes of reinterpretation and negotiations, with accounting bringing together local practices (Alawattage and Fernando, 2017). Accordingly, the *Instructions* also stipulated how local affairs on the Coast should be managed (§14). The governor and council should live in good friendship with “other governments” (other Europeans, that is), as well as the local Africans, and they should not assist pirates. In particular, the directors instructed the governor and council to remain on good terms with the king of Akwamu and pay the customary “costume” (that is wages, or tribute) to him as well as the caboceers in Osu.

The relations between a European trading company such as the DWIGC and the local African communities exemplified contested power, conflicts of interests and instabilities. Europeans routinely sought relations codified through treaties specifying rights and duties; however, such written treaties were perhaps more important in intra-European relations than for relations with Africans (as discussed by Shumway, 2014). The Danish “rights” to Fort Christiansborg were derived from a treaty concluded with the king of Great Accra in 1661, by which the King sold the company “the right to use and employ as their property, at their will and pleasure, the whole area and rights in *Ozzou* in all perpetuity.”²⁵ Equally importantly, day-to-day relations were regulated through oaths and custom – a practice that was held to be legally and morally binding. On the part of the Danish company this “right of property” was understood to entail a (preferably exclusive) right to trade with the Africans settled in the area, as well as a right of jurisdiction over and duty to protect them.²⁶ On the part of the African rulers, this entailed a right to demand *costume* or ground rent and an obligation to facilitate trade at the fort.

The Danes formed close relationships with local Ga people living at Osu below Christiansborg, whose leading men, caboceers, as mentioned, acted as middlemen, merchant brokers, and negotiators when trading with merchants from inland. The Danes also had to maintain good relations to the larger inland Empire of Akwamu, which claimed sovereignty over the Accra area. There were frequent conflicts between the local coastal people and the people from the interior. The king of Akwamu had claimed the rights over Christiansborg for himself when he conquered the people in the Accra area in 1681. In the

²⁵ Treatise in (Justesen, 2005, p. 12f).

²⁶ Compare Justesen, 2005, p. 202, 608f, and Rømer, 2000, p. 231.

late seventeenth century, the fort was even conquered by an Akwamu *caboceer*, but it was eventually sold back to the Danes because it was deemed more conducive to Akwamu commercial interests. In 1709, the Akwamu returned to reassert their dominion and then apparently reorganized the trade with the Europeans (Kea, 1980; Nørregård 1966). According to the Danish sources, the king of Akwamu was paid a monthly amount as a “ground rent” as well as other occasional gifts and tributes, and the *caboceers* in Osu received a monthly stipend to ensure their loyalty and services (Justesen, 2005, p. 109). The directors instructed the governor and council to remain on good terms with the king of Akwamu, and pay the customary *costume* 20-50 *rigsdaler* worth of cargo goods according to services rendered to the company.

Positive relations with the local Osu coastal community were as essential as positive relations with the Akwamu. It should be noted, of course, that these “positive” accountability relations were between different partners in the slave trade, and as such aimed at ensuring the brutal trade in slaves allowed for profitability for all sides. The local Osu people settled around Christiansborg and acted as middlemen bringing commodities to the fort to trade and supplying the fort with goods essential to maintaining life – such as food, water and firewood – as well as labour. One way these relations were established was through personal connections. As such Boye’s earlier “marriage” to Koko, the daughter of a local trader, seems to have been instrumental to his success. Such marriages furnished the Europeans with reliable trading partners and political connections. The Africans also benefited by gaining European commodities and credit (on these marriages and relations, see Ipsen, 2015, pp. 28-29, 53 for the case of Boye; Shumway, 2011).

But the relationship with the Osu coastal community was also contested and had to be constantly renegotiated. On one occasion (which was only revealed during the trial against Boye), Tette, the *caboceer*, eminent trader and political head of Osu (and father of Koko), had rejected the fort’s control over the village, refusing to send his men to work there and insulting Boye. In return, Boye asserted his superiority in the relationship by firing a cannon over the roof of Tette’s house, arguing it was necessary to ensure respect and prevent the poor treatment of Europeans. On another occasion, Boye fired a canon at two local fishermen to prevent them from trading with a foreign ship, again to maintain control of trade at the fort (VgK 285, pp. 82f and 113f.). In both cases, relations were re-established through domination and the threat of violence, and actual violence. In both cases, the Africans were forced to pay fines as punishment. Such incidents amply show the contestability and fragility of relationships between Europeans and Africans. They demonstrate that the “cultural agency of the colonized becomes a complex assemblage of desire, [and] power...” (Alawattage and Fernando 2017, p. 2).

With both the king of Akwamu and the local *caboceers*, accounting played a central role in establishing profitable trading relations. The different rights and responsibilities that constituted the relations between the parties were accounted for in monetary terms (although often paid in kind or in services). As Boye reported in his letters, he had sent gifts to the king of Akwamu to maintain good relations, gifts which also served to reaffirm and symbolize the Akwamu dominion over the Osu coastal community and the fort. These expenses were entered into the account books. In addition to the *costume*, the Company

would give the *caboceers* commodities on credit to facilitate trade. As doing so from Company funds was prohibited by Company policy, Boye later justified his private trading as a means of covering the expenses of advancing goods on credit to the local people, which according to Boye was necessary for remaining on good terms with them and keeping trade alive at the fort (VgK 285, pp. 14, 17-20). As such the Ga traders were listed in the accounts as debtors to the Company, having been given commodities on credit (Justesen, 2005, p. 337). The locals, in turn, facilitated commerce at the fort by bringing trade, goods and slaves, working at the fort, and paying fines in cases of breach of responsibilities. As we saw, the governor's power over the locals was expressed by the levying of fines as punishment for disobedience (see again VgK 285, pp. 82f and 113f.).

Conversely, the power of the Akwamu king to punish the slave traders for their non-compliance was equally evident: he could prevent trade and even besiege the fort. The effects of compliance were also tangible and could be registered in the accounts as increased trade at the fort. This was clearly brought out when Boye initially attempted to carve out greater commercial and political independence from Akwamu, resisting demands to increase the financial costume tribute and in effect reducing the company's accountability to the Akwamu. Instead, he sought to strengthen relations with fellow Europeans and the local Ga people at Osu. In response, however, the Akwamu blocked the roads to the Danish fort, and Boye eventually paid the tribute and sent reconciliatory gifts to their king so that trade would continue (Svensli, 2015, pp. 90f).

For the Company's directors in Copenhagen, accountability relations to Africans were, arguably, part of a process of colonialization, where relations were codified in writing, granting rights of property and jurisdiction to the Company, enforced by custom, negotiation and force. Nevertheless, in light of their commercial, mercantile capitalist interests, Europeans considered it important to apportion some Danish profits to the local community and African traders. Governor Boye thus justified his use of some company resources as necessary to promote good relations with the local African traders, rulers and community at large. This presented challenges in terms of conflicting interests and power relationships. In a letter dated 1712, Boye reported that the king of Akwamu continued to obstruct trade by waging war against "the other natives of the country from whom the trade comes" and preventing trade at the fort when it had been stocked with good commodities bought from Dutch and English ships.²⁷ However, with a letter dated 1 July 1713, the directors sent gifts for the King to cement the good relations with Akwamu.²⁸ In a long letter dated 3 April 1714, signed by Boye and the rest of the Governing Council, Boye reported that he had complied, giving the Akwamu king the luxury gifts which the directors had sent him with the ship.²⁹ The Danes thus sought to influence the king through luxury gifts, as was established practice in European-African relationships. For his part, the king of Akwamu saw the Danish fort as an important point of access to the Atlantic trade in firearms and other goods for shoring up his own power base (Kea 1980; Shumway 2011, 63f. with references). The accountability systems of the DWIGC played a key role in

27 Letter of 29.09.1712 (Justesen, 2005, p. 240f).

28 Letter of 01.07.1713 (VgK 54).

29 Letter of 03.04.1714 (Justesen, 2005, p. 246-9, here pp. 247f).

enabling the company to react to the interests and demands of their African trading partners. The interplay between European and local African political-commercial interests thus had the effect of drawing West Africa into Atlantic trading, not least in slaves, with far-reaching consequences for life on the Coast (Shumway 2011, 60f. and passim).

SECTION 5: The legal case and investigation against Boye: Profits and conflicts

Accountability mechanisms and relationships are not merely instruments for managing and controlling performance; they are also arenas for power struggles (Boven, 2010; Robert and Scapens, 1985). In the legal case against Boye, we see how these issues played out during the early eighteenth-century slave trade.

Boye may be thought of as a “man of his time” pursuing prosperity in line with mercantile capitalism’s profit and power incentive represented in his instructions and contractual obligations. Yet wealth accumulation as a *raison d’être* in itself does not ensure commonality of interest among power holders and stewards, principals and agents. Constructing companies or social relations with ideologies promoting maximizing wealth has consequences that the intricacies of regulation cannot suppress. Boye’s contract sought to anticipate such eventualities by determining how he was to be formally held accountable, including provisions for a legal inquiry to be registered in a court protocol. The case brought against him is explored in the following.

The first steps towards a case against Boye had already been taken in 1714. Boye had earlier appointed a certain Peter Østrup as accountant, but due to unexplained disagreements had dismissed him and sent him home in 1714. Back in Copenhagen, Østrup levelled several complaints of mismanagement and breach of contract against Boye to the company directors. Østrup, in turn, was sent back to Christiansborg on the Gold Coast in 1717 with letters dismissing Boye and authorising Østrup to initiate a legal investigation into his governorship.

A letter dated 9 July 1717 dismissed Boye from his post and appointed the merchant Knud Rost as interim governor to preside over the case against Boye for charges of maladministration of his office (VgK 55, pp. 100-113, with the accusations on pp. 114-119). The letter contained eighteen accusations, the foremost of which was that Boye had allegedly engaged in private trading with Dutch, French, Portuguese and particularly English ships, and local traders, in commodities ordered through his contacts in England and kept in the fort warehouse. Moreover, Boye allowed local African traders as well as English interlopers to trade at the fort, undercutting company offers. He also sold the company's useful goods to the English at low prices and on several occasions bought useless goods from the English for more than they were worth, against the will of the Governing Council (§§3, 5-8). In effect, Boye was being accused of breaking his obligations according to the accountability relations, disrupting the structures put in place to assure the continuance of trade.

With specific regard to the slave trade, Boye was accused of having sold slaves to “all nations” on his own account at the fort and permitted both white and black traders to do

the same (§11), and falsifying accounts in this regard. Boye, it seems, had worked to maximize his independence and had manoeuvred within the accountability system. In his self-interest, Boye strove to resist the directors' attempts at exerting control over him by availing himself of the same resources that made him valuable to the company: his contacts and experience. With the advantage of information asymmetry, he revealed some information and concealed other information as it suited his purpose, most crucially the fact that he was engaged in private trading.

Some accusations against Boye were hard to prove, and on the face of it, others seem improbable. Towards the end of his testimony in the ensuing trial, which was held at Fort Christiansborg, Company employee Claus Fedders said that he had heard from an English captain that Boye had become very rich from his private trade – so much so that “if Boye survived and returned to England he would be worth £30,000” (VgK 285, p. 91.). That is, more than seventeen times his total salary for the eight years he served as governor.³⁰ Against the accusation that Boye had sold company goods to European traders at a cheaper price than they should otherwise have been, Knud Rost explained in his testimony that this could have been done to get “money in the chest [*casa*]” (VgK 285, p. 100), that is, as a way of converting fixed stock into liquid capital. Finally, Boye claimed that if he had been profiting from selling slaves, company profits would have been impossible and he challenged Østrup and the witnesses to produce accounts that proved his private trading in slaves. Fedders replied that many slaves had not been entered into the books, and it was therefore impossible to say how much and how many slaves had been sold privately (VgK 285, p. 65). The accounting records, despite the elaborate accountability processes, were inaccurate. Again, the invisibility of the slaves as people, and in this case even as numbers, enabled the trade to continue.

Fedders further testified to ways in which Boye had sought to circumvent the accountability mechanisms in place, specifically the checks on the governor's powers through mutual accountability between governor and council. Thus, Fedders argued that Boye had lent Østrup money so that he would not reveal Boye's private trade. Boye further supposedly kept strict control of the account books. According to Fedders neither Østrup nor anyone else dared refuse to sign the trade books and ledgers for fear of antagonizing Boye. Both Rost and Østrup had thus signed the books without being able to verify their truthfulness. Boye had once, supposedly, been very angry with Rost because he asked a ship's captain how much he paid for slaves he bought from Boye (VgK 285, pp. 71f.). Boye had thus done his best to escape his accountability to the governing council and instead solidified his power over the other employees. This effectively removed a mechanism intended to ensure the veracity of the books. But this was not the only way the books could distort the information communicated.

30 In 1700-1709 a common worker in Copenhagen would earn 16 skilling a day or about 61 rigsdaler a year (Thestrup, 1991, p. 22). Boye's yearly salary (to include costs for food and other expenses) was 1,000 rigsdaler, the salary for the second-highest position, the merchant, was 300 rigsdaler (see 'Reglement' appended to the *Instructions*). Here it must be kept in mind that living expenses on the Coast were much higher than at home. The cost of a male slave in 1711 was on average 35 Rdl. (Hernæs, 1998, p. Appendix I).

One accusation related directly to falsifying the books is particularly interesting as it reveals a great deal about the goings-on at the fort that did not make it into the official accounts and letters. Østrup claimed that Boyes had entered slaves into the books as having died when, in fact, Boye had sold them privately at a clear loss to the company. Both Fedders and Rost were questioned further, and in their answers they both referred to the cargo bought from an English interloper in October 1714. This was evidently a notable episode for all involved and illustrates the limitations of ordinary letters and bookkeeping when accounting for what happened in the slave trade at Christiansborg. While the account book records the deaths of the slaves, they say nothing about the reason for these deaths, which only became apparent in the course of the interrogations. Rost attested that several slaves from that ship had been weak and ill, and it was alleged that their deaths were due, at least in part, to a very rough beating they had received from a certain sergeant Harboe, an employee of the company “who understood neither the language nor how to treat the slaves” and had beaten them because they were “obstinate” (VgK 285, pp. 70 and 107f.). What would otherwise have only be recorded as a series of numbers in a trade ledger was revealed to be a story of a sizeable cargo of slaves dying from maltreatment at Christiansborg. The court details enable us to get a glimpse of the violent treatment of the slaves, hidden in the formal accountability records. The condition of the slaves had been so poor that Boye and the ship’s captain had agreed that those who died within three or four days would not be paid for (VgK 285, p. 74). While this episode brought the brutality of the slave trade into full view, the whole situation and the question of moral culpability was only discussed in terms of loss to the company.

The case against Boye drew out far beyond the time expected by the directors. But eventually, the court pronounced Boye guilty of private trading contrary to his contract and *Instructions*, adding however that the precise extent of the activity could not be determined (VgK 285, p. 118). Subsequently, Boye was sent with a home-bound ship to Copenhagen to give account to the directors and face final judgement (VgK 49, pp. 334ff.). It would seem, however, that Boye managed to escape this final accountability to the directors as he never reached Copenhagen (VgK 55, pp. 378f.).³¹

The transatlantic slave trade could only function with officers like Boye who were simultaneously almost entirely expendable within the larger structures of the DWIGC and indeed the European slave trade: he was easily replaced by others. The accountability mechanisms in place largely functioned as intended: he was removed and replaced, leading to refinement of the accountability mechanisms in the *Instructions* issued to his successors. The mechanisms also functioned as planned by being silent about the plight of the slaves. They were racialized accounts in hiding the violence perpetrated and facilitating a larger system of racial exploitation (Annisette and Prasad, 2014).

Section 6: Discussion and conclusions

³¹ In 1727 Boye was again working as a trader at Ouidah (on the “Slave Coast”) with his son-in-law, John Smith, where he died on 24 September (Law 1991, p. 9).

In this paper we illustrate the role of accounting in maintaining relationships fundamental to the mercantile slave trade, and we demonstrate the accountability systems that were integral to this. Our case illustrates that the organization of chartered slave trading companies was supported by normalized, sanitized and routinized classification schemes that presented the trading of enslaved Africans as no different from the trading of any other commodity being traded. We reject the conventional view of accounting as a passive and impartial data provider and argue that the accountability and accounting processes legitimated violence and sought to hide the sheer brutality of the trade in humans. This was both an automatic product of the accountability mechanisms in place, and a deliberate praxis (as seen in the silence about the violence perpetrated). Joseph (2014) cautions that whilst accounts appear as impersonal justifications, these quantifications purposefully and powerfully lead to a “physically violent removal of things and people from their embeddedness in social relations” (Joseph 2014, p. xviii).

We rely on the works of Alawattage and Fernando (2017), Annisette and Prasad (2017), Araújo et al. (2017), Bakre (2008), Boven (2010) and Roberts and Scapens (1985) to explain how accounting reproduced structures of domination, signification and legitimation related to racialized accumulation of mercantile capital and wealth. Such literature guides us in viewing accounting practices and accountability mechanisms as projecting the legitimacy of slave trade and racialized distributions of wealth. Profit was a legitimated *raison d'être* for traders, investors, enterprises and monarchies and the violent activities that facilitated its acquisition were supported by accountability mechanisms. These did, for a time, seemingly establish a normalized “virtuous” commercial activity where certain Africans were transformed into objects of trade while other Africans (kings, leaders, traders) entered into tenuous partnerships with Europeans, with violence at once legitimated and unspoken. One form of domination takes place with the inclusion and participation of people - tribes, Europeans and trading “allies” - subscribing to this particular rationality or “virtue” to secure wealth and profit. Reports and records of the DWIGC gave meaning and legitimacy to practices construing humans as marketable commodities. Slave traders justified their vile practices by demonstrating their accountability “virtue,” their compliance with mechanisms in place, and their trading acumen to ensure profits, all of which in turn allowed company directors to fund slave trading and maintain accountability to their superiors and elites. Accountability reports appeared simply as an objective reality, a neutral system, rather than as part of systems of subjugation.

But these were contested and unstable arrangements. The case of Boye reveals the presence of private profiteering as transgressing the standardized established behaviour. Boye was not prosecuted for trading enslaved Africans and treating them as commodities; this was his contractual responsibility. Rather his activities were suspect for trading for personal advantage in contradiction of his contract – an assault on the fundamentals of the principal-agent relationship under mercantile capitalism. It was only in the mutual incrimination of Company employees in the extraordinary court case against Boye that the casual violence inflicted upon the slaves and their resulting death were even registered as anything other than a “loss” in the accounting ledger. But even in this case, it was only discussed as a question of the loss and mismanagement of company resources. As such, the

mechanisms of accountability and the accompanying accounting technologies facilitated the enslavement and trade of Africans and made them invisible as humans.

Despite the accountability processes, conflicts abounded between Europeans and between Europeans and Africans and between the Africans. But the brutality of the trade was mainly hidden from the records. As is inevitable in practices of social relations, accountability is a murky place, given the compromises and antagonisms. We tracked how particular virtues are temporarily stabilized or changed and how they may dominate or become subordinate. We show how accounting and accountability contributed to legitimating slavery noting that the humanity of the enslaved was silenced in the process.

We have sought to examine what the accounting and accountability systems of mercantile capitalism have concealed and left unexplored. Revealing hidden stories is one of the most significant aims of critical accounting research, acknowledging accounting's capacity to erase, restrain and reduce social phenomenon to the abstraction of rules, procedures and reports. Critical accounting explores accounting's impact on making things knowable and hence our concern to uncover inequalities and how these social injustices were operationalized to render slaves "invisible as people" (Annisette and Prasad, 2017, p. 9). As people, they remain social and moral beings whose sense of social justice cannot be captured in the logic of accounting. Focussing on discourses of accountability and using the work of scholars who have similarly analysed control and power, we describe how the Danish slave trade operationalized accountability. Inevitably, our descriptions are incomplete. There are few written or "counter" accounts of what really happened (Agyemang and Lehman, 2013; Chwastiak, 2013; Dey et al 2011; Gallhofer et al 2006; Lehman et al, 2016, 2018). Narratives written by slaves would reveal a different "account" of these silenced people. The narratives would provide descriptions and interpretations and an alternative means of understanding decisions and lives (see Hurston, 2018; and also Ipsen, 2015 for some African perspectives on the slave trade). Such accounts tend not to exist. Critical reading of some sources may bring tiny glimpses of slave experiences as we have shown from the sources relating to the Boye case.

Our interest in understanding the role of accounting in the eighteenth-century slave trade is for exploring paradigm shifts and our current time of social change. Whilst in contemporary times and everyday parlance, accountability is often seen as a virtue and as such a *good thing*, our research contributes to scholarship highlighting how ensuring accountability in the trade in slaves as such cannot be considered a positive attainment, let alone a "virtue". Instead we must always consider the purposes which such accountability served and the larger systems they facilitated. Thus, in this case accountability was precisely instrumental in maintaining the slave trade, facilitating and maintaining a system by all accounts morally reprehensible and brutal in its exploitation domination. In accounting, numbers can "produce certain forms of visibility and transparency . . . [to] configure persons, domains and actions as objective and comparable" (Mennicken and Miller, 2014, p. 25). By recognizing that "accounting is only of importance in a given context, opening up accounting to the real-world-of-affairs" (Lowe and Puxty, 1990, p. 54) this paper begins the exploration of the role of accountability in the context of the slave trade as a means of understanding contemporary accountability relationships.

REFERENCES

Manuscript sources

Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Denmark:

- VgK 18: Referater og Vota. [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/en/billedviser?epid=1682545#292829,59074284>, accessed 25.10.2017]
- VgK 15-16: Direktions- og generalforsamlingsprotokol [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?epid=1682524#292827,59073393>. Accessed 26.10.2017].
- VgK 23: Instruks- og bestallingsbog [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?epid=20202185#292833,59075798>. Accessed 26.10.2017].
- VgK 48, 49: Kopibog til Europæiske Missiver [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?bsid=292848#292848,59080505>, accessed 27.10.2017].
- VgK 54: Amerikanske og Afrikanske kopibog [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?bsid=292853#292853,59082960>, accessed 27.10.2017].
- VgK 55: Amerikanske og Afrikanske kopibog, no. 66 ... 24.12.1716-27.10.1727, pp. 378f. [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?epid=1684116#292854,59083383>, accessed 07.02.2018]
- VgK 121: Breve og dokumenter fra Guinea (1683-1754): 1705 – 1722. [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?epid=20202279#292913,59112256>, accessed 07.02.2018]
- VgK 285: Forhørs- og domsakter fra Guinea. No. 4. Protocol angaaende Det forhør og Vidners hörelse over forrige opperhoved Frans Boye. [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?bsid=293070#293070,59181168>, accessed 07.02.2018]
- VgK 890A-B: Retsprotokol. Vestindisk-Guineisk Kompagni, Den Særlige Ret i Sagen mod Fhv. Guvernør Frans Boye. [available at <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?bsid=293452#293452,59306589>, accessed 07.02.2018]
- VgK 894: Negotiehovedbog. Det Kongelige Octroyerede Dandske WestIndiske oc Guineiske Compagnies Hofvet Bog. Paa Fortresset Christiansborg udi Guinea [...] For Anno 171. 1712. 1713. 1714. 1715. 1716 og 1717. [available at: <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?epid=1747022#293455,59307410>, accessed 23.10.2017]
- VgK 914-915: Negotiejournal. Negotiens Journal for Fortresset Christiansborg i Guinea [available at: <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?epid=1747128#293468,59313228>, accessed 23.10.2017]
- National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom:
- C 113/272 1719-1722: Letters from the Court of Assistants and officials of the Royal African Company in London, and some from Holland to their employees and agents in West Africa.

Edited sources and scholarship

- Agyemang, G. and Lehman, C. (2013). Adding critical accounting voices to migration studies. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 24(4/5), 261-272.
- Alawattage, C., & Fernando, S. (2017). Postcoloniality in corporate social and environmental accountability. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 60, 1-20.
- Anes, R.D. (2002). Accounting and slavery: the accounts of the English South Sea Company, 1713-22. *European Accounting Review*, 11, 441-452.
- Annisette, M. (2009). Race and Ethnicity In J.R. Edwards & S.P. Walker (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Accounting History* (pp. 450-469). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Annisette, M., and Prasad, A. (2017). Critical accounting research in hyper-racial times. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 43, 5-19.
- Annisette, M. and Trivedi, V. U. (2013). Globalization, paradox and the (un)making of identities: Immigrant Chartered Accountants of India in Canada. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 38, 1-29.
- Araújo W. G., Rodrigues L. L. & Craig R. 'Empire as an imagination of the centre': The Rio de Janeiro School of Commerce and the development of accounting education in Brazil. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 46 (2017) 38-53
- Bakre, O. (2008) Financial reporting as technology that supports and sustains imperial expansion, maintenance and control in the colonial and post-colonial globalisation: The case of the Jamaican economy. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 19 487-522.
- Bovens, M., (2010). Two Concepts of Accountability: Accountability as a Virtue and as a Mechanism. *West European Politics*, 33, 946-967.
- Brauner, C. (2015). *Kompanien, Könige Und Caboceers: Interkulturelle Diplomatie an Gold-Und Sklavenküste Im 17. Und 18. Jahrhundert*. Köln: Boehlau Verlag.
- Carlos, A. M. (1994). Bonding and the Agency Problem: Evidence from the Royal African Company, 1672-1691. *Explorations in Economic History*, 31, 313-335.
- Carlos, A. M., and Stephen Nicholas. (1988). "Giants of an Earlier Capitalism": The Chartered Trading Companies as Modern Multinationals'. *Business History Review* 62 (3): 398-419.
- Carmona, S., Donoso, R., Walker, S.P. (2010). Accounting and international relations: Britain, Spain and the Asiento treaty. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 35, 252-273.
- Chwastiak, M. (2013) Profiting from destruction: The Iraq reconstruction, auditing and the management of fraud. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 24(1), 32-43.
- Cooper, C. (2015). Accounting for the fictitious: A Marxist contribution to understanding accounting's roles in the financial crisis. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 30, 63-82.
- Dey, C., Russell, S., & Thomson, I. (2011) "Exploring the potential of shadow accounts in problematizing institutional conduct" in Osbourne S., & Ball, A. (eds) *Social Accounting and Public Management: Accountability for the Common Good* Abingdon: Routledge, 64-75.
- Farjaudon, A. and Morales J. (2013) In Search of Consensus: The Role of Accounting in the Definition and Reproduction of Dominant Interests *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 24(2):154-171.

- Feldbæk, O. (1986). *Danske Handelskompagnier 1616-1843: oktrojer og interne ledelsesregler*. København: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie.
- Fleischman, R.K., (2004). Confronting moral issues from accounting's dark side. *Accounting History*, 9, 7–23.
- Fleischman, R.K., Oldroyd, D., Tyson, T.N. (2011a). Plantation accounting and management practices in the US and the British West Indies at the end of their slavery eras. *The Economic History Review*, 64, 765–797.
- Fleischman, R.K., Oldroyd, D., Tyson, T.N. (2011b). The efficacy/inefficacy of accounting in controlling labour during the transition from slavery in the United States and British West Indies. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 24, 751–780.
- Fleischman, R.K., Oldroyd, D., Tyson, T.N. (2004). Monetising human life: slave valuations on US and British West Indian plantations." *Accounting History*, 9, 35–62.
- Gallhofer, S., Haslam, J., Monk, E., & Roberts, C. (2006) The Emancipatory Potential of Online Reporting: The Case of Counter Accounting. *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal* 19(5), 681–718.
- Gøbel, E. (2016). *The Danish Slave Trade and Its Abolition*. Leiden: BRILL.
- Gøbel, E. (2015). *Vestindisk-guineisk Kompagni 1671-1754: studier og kilder til kompagniet og kolonierne : med Peder Mariagers beretning om kompagniet*. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag.
- Gøbel, E. (2002). *A guide to sources for the history of the Danish West Indies (U.S. Virgin Islands), 1671-1917*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Gøbel, E. (1983). Danish trade to the West Indies and Guinea, 1671–1754. *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 31, 21–49.
- Hansen, H. K., & Mühlen-Schulte, A. (2012). The power of numbers in global governance. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 15(4), 455-465.
- Harney, N. (2011) Accounting for African Migrants in Naples, Italy. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 22, 644-53.
- Henige, D. (1980). "Companies Are Always Ungrateful": James Phipps of Cape Coast, a Victim of the African Trade. *African Economic History*, 9, 27–47.
- Hernæs, P. (2006). "A Sombre Affair": The Story Of A Slave Ship Mutiny And The Destiny Of The Mutineers Upon Their Return To Africa. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 10, 215–222.
- Hernæs, P. (1998). *Slaves, Danes, and African coast society: the Danish slave trade from West Africa and Afro-Danish relations on the eighteenth-century Gold Coast*. Trondheim: University of Trondheim.
- Hurston, Z. N. (2018) *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"* New York: Harper Collins.
- Ipsen, P. (2015). *Daughters of the Trade: Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriage on the Gold Coast*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jones, S. R. H., and Simon P. Ville. (1996). 'Efficient Transactors or Rent-Seeking Monopolists? The Rationale for Early Chartered Trading Companies'. *The Journal of Economic History* 56 (4): 898–915.
- Joseph, M. (2014) *Debt to Society: Accounting for Life under Capitalism* Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Justesen, O. (Ed.). (2005). *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana, 1657-1754*. København: Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab.

- Kea, R. (1980). Administration and Trade in the Akwamu Empire, 1681-1730. In: R.E. Dumett & B.K. Swartz (Eds.), *West African Culture Dynamics: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives* (pp. 371-392). The Hague: Mouton.
- Law, R. (Ed.). (1991). *Correspondence of the Royal African Company's Chief Merchants at Cabo Corso Castle with William's Fort, Whydah, and the Little Popo Factory, 1727-1728: An Annotated Transcription of Ms. Francklin 1055/1 in the Bedfordshire County Record Office* (No. 3). African Studies Program University of Wisconsin.
- Lehman, C., Annisette, M., & Agyemang, G. (2016) Immigration and neoliberalism: three cases and counter accounts *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 29 (1), 43-79.
- Lehman, C., Hammond, T., & Agyemang, G. (2018) Accounting for Crime in the US: Race, Class and the Spectacle of Fear *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 56, 63-75.
- Lowe T. and Puxty, T. (1990) Accounting as Social Science: Some Implications for Teaching and Research. *Directions*, 12(1), 54-72.
- Mennicken, A. (2013), 'Too Big to Fail and Too Big to Succeed': Accounting and Privatisation in the Prison Service of England and Wales. *Financial Accountability & Management*, 29, 206-226.
- Mennicken, A. and Miller, P. (2014) Michel Foucault and the Administering of Lives. In Adler, P. S., Du Gay, P., Morgan, G. and Reed, M. (2014), *Oxford Handbook of Sociology, Social Theory and Organization Studies: Contemporary Currents* (pp. 11-38). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nørregård, G. (1966). *Danish settlements in West Africa, 1658-1850*. Boston, Mass.: Boston University Press.
- Oldroyd, D. (1998). John Johnson's Letters: the Accounting Role of Tudor Merchants' Correspondence. *The Accounting Historians Journal*, 25(1), 57-72.
- Oldroyd, D., Dobie, A. (2009). Bookkeeping. In J.R. Edwards & S.P. Walker (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Accounting History* (pp. 450-469). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Oldroyd, D., Fleischman, R.K., Tyson, T.N., (2008). The culpability of accounting practice in promoting slavery in the British Empire and antebellum United States. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 19, 764-784.
- Pinto, O., & West, B. (2017a). Accounting, slavery and social history: the legacy of an eighteenth-century Portuguese chartered company. *Accounting History*, 22(2), 141-166.
- Pinto, O., & West, B. (2017b). Accounting and the history of the everyday life of captains, sailors and common seamen in eighteenth-century Portuguese slave trading. *Accounting History*, 22(3), 320-347.
- Porter, R. (1968). English chief factors on the Gold Coast, 1632-1753. *African Historical Studies*, 1(2), 199-209.
- Reese, T.M. (2013). Controlling the Company: The Structures of Fante-British Relations on the Gold Coast, 1750-1821. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41, 104-119.
- Reindorf, J. (1980). *Scandinavians in Africa: guide to materials relating to Ghana in the Danish National Archives / compiled by J. Reindorf; with additional material by P.E. Olsen*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Roberts, J., Scapens, R. (1985). Accounting systems and systems of accountability—understanding accounting practices in their organisational contexts. *Accounting*,

- organizations and society*, 10, 443–456.
- Rømer, L.F. (2000). *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*. Oxford: British Academy.
- Shumway, R. (2011). *The Fante and the transatlantic slave trade*. Rochester, NY: Woodbridge: University of Rochester Press ; Boydell & Brewer.
- Shumway, R. (2014) 'Palavers and Treaty Making in the British Acquisition of the Gold Coast Colony (West Africa)'. In S. Belmessous (Ed.), *Empire by Treaty. Negotiating European Expansion, 1600-1900* (pp. 161–85). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sinclair, A. (1995). The chameleon of accountability: Forms and discourses. *Accounting organizations and Society*, 20, 219–237.
- Svensli, F.H. (2015). "A Fine Flintlock, a Pair of Ditto Pistols and a Hat with a Gold Galloon": Danish Political and Commercial Strategies on the Gold Coast in the Early 18th Century. In H. Weiss (Ed.), *Ports of globalisation, places of Creolisation: Nordic possessions in the Atlantic world during the era of the slave trade* (pp. 68–100). Leiden: Brill.
- Thestrup, P. (1991). *Mark og skilling, kroner og øre, pengeenheder, priser og lønninger i Danmark i 350 år (1640-1989)*. Arkivernes informationsserie. København: Rigsarkivet.
- Tyson, T.N., Oldroyd, D., Fleischman, R.K., (2005). Accounting, Coercion and Social Control during Apprenticeship: Converting Slave Workers to Wage Workers in the British West Indies, c. 1834-1838. *The Accounting Historians Journal*, 32, 201–231.
- Westergaard, W. (1917). *The Danish West Indies under Company rule 1671-1754*. New York: Macmillan.