Cosmopolitan cocoa farmers: refashioning Africa in Divine Chocolate advertisements
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This article concerns a beguiling set of advertisements for Divine Chocolate that feature women cocoa farmers from Ghana, which recently appeared in British editions of women’s magazines, such as Elle, Cosmopolitan, Red, and OK!, as well as colour supplements in the Guardian newspapers, beginning in March 2005 (Figures 1–5). In contrast to the twentieth-century history of representing African women as exotic icons of ‘traditional’ cultures or leaders of progressive development schemes, the Divine advertisements present the farmers as cosmopolitan consumers of luxury goods and as owners of the company. By representing these Ghanaian women as glamorous business owners, the images invite viewers to see them as potent actors in transnational exchanges of cocoa and chocolate, and as beneficiaries of these exchanges, in contrast to analyses that focus on market exploitation by the nation state or corporate actors. The images pose a challenge to narratives that cast Africa as continually on the losing side of harmful binaries – primitive/civilized, traditional/modern – and in an eternal developmental lag. Instead, they offer an alluring female figure that envisions and promotes Africa’s roles in industrial production and luxury consumption. Through a complex rendering of Ghanaian women farmers as attractive, socially mobile beneficiaries of their own development efforts, the adverts invite connections among people who grow, sell, and consume luxuries like chocolate, across a visual gulf that is often too vast to bridge.

Keywords: advertisements; chocolate; clothing; development; farmers; Ghana; modernity; representations; women

Introduction
This article concerns a beguiling set of advertisements for Divine Chocolate¹ that feature women cocoa farmers from Ghana, which appeared in British editions of women’s magazines, such as Elle, Cosmopolitan, Red, and OK!, as well as colour supplements in the Guardian newspapers, beginning in March 2005 (Figures 1–5). In contrast to the twentieth-century history of representing African women as exotic icons of ‘traditional’ cultures or leaders of progressive development schemes, the Divine advertisements present the farmers as cosmopolitan consumers of luxury goods, and as owners of the company that makes the chocolate bars.

In their depiction of women cocoa farmers as glamorous business owners, the images provide a fresh visual reframing of the exchanges of goods and capital between Africa and Europe (Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie 2010), and a contrast to some postcolonial literature on state-capital formations in Africa. In his influential theorization of Africa’s gatekeeper state, Frederick Cooper (2002) suggests that African heads of state control almost utterly both export revenues and incoming aid and investment, little of which moves through horizontal (class) ties or engenders widespread development. In his analysis of foreign direct investment in Africa in a ‘neoliberal age’, James Ferguson (2006) presents persuasive evidence that investing entities favour ‘enclave extraction’ that benefits few African individuals while enriching foreign firms. While
I do not contest the validity and importance of either analysis in describing postcolonial African political economy, I suggest that the Divine advertisements offer an opportunity to look beyond the exploitative market manoeuvres of nation states and corporate firms, inviting viewers to see women farmers as potent actors in transnational exchanges of raw materials and luxury goods, and as beneficiaries of these exchanges.

As postcolonial literature on Africa has suggested, the binaries that underlie the modernity narrative – primitive/civilized, traditional/modern, underdeveloped/developed – continue to permeate discursive representations of Africa (Wainaina 2005; Ferguson 1994; Jarosz 1992) and shape the forms of its ‘development’ (Little and Dolan 2000; Ferguson 1999). Read within the transnational feminist literature on advertising and textual representations of women’s bodies (Weinbaum et al. 2008; Thomas 2006; Barlow et al. 2005; Ramamurthy 2004, 2003; Nagar et al. 2002), the Divine images pose a challenge to narratives that cast Africa as continually on the losing side of harmful dualisms and reframe Africa’s role in modernity. Through a complex rendering of Ghanaian women farmers as attractive, socially mobile beneficiaries of their own development efforts, the Divine adverts offer a positive space in British print media for viewers to question narratives that place Africa in an eternal developmental lag. They invite connections among people who grow, sell, and consume luxuries like chocolate, across a visual gulf that is often too vast to bridge.
The Divine advertisements offer an enlightening contrast to the more common imagery of African women that appears outside the continent, as I suggest through comparisons with *National Geographic*’s representations of African women as exotic cultural icons and Oxfam International’s images of women as development trustees. Because the adverts represent the women’s position as co-owners of Divine Chocolate as a form of development, I read them against the trajectory of European development theory and practice. I then suggest that the adverts’ gendered development imagery reframes Africa’s role in modernity, creating an alluring female figure that envisions and promotes Africa’s contributions to industrial production and its role in luxury consumption. In conclusion, I consider the positive contribution the images make to depictions of Africa in British print media and popular culture.

**Creating the advertisements**

According to Sophi Tranchell, Managing Director of the London-based company, Divine Chocolate commissioned the advertisements to ‘highlight our unique selling point that Divine is owned by the farmers that grow the cocoa – members of the Kuapa Kokoo cooperative’.² The relationship between the two companies is intimate and unique among ethical cocoa trade arrangements: beyond the company’s Fairtrade certification,³ Kuapa Kokoo owns nearly half the shares in Divine Chocolate. Because Kuapa Kokoo is a cooperative, every farmer member is thus a
partial owner of Divine. Accordingly, Divine pledges to distribute its dividends among Kuapa Kokoo farmers, as the company would with any other shareholder.⁴

Divine Chocolate expends considerable effort to make Kuapa Kokoo farmers – and Ghana as a cocoa origin site – visible to Britain’s chocolate shoppers. Among Divine’s many efforts in this direction include the prominent use of Ghana’s adinkra symbols on its bar wrappers,⁵ the display of photographs and biographic stories of Kuapa Kokoo members on its website,⁶ and the sponsorship of public relations tours to Britain for cocoa farmers, where they meet with chocolate lovers and trade policymakers. As an ethical business with a popular product, Divine Chocolate has featured prominently in The Guardian and Observer newspapers – the company won the Observer Best Ethical Business Award in 2008⁷ – at the Glastonbury Music Festival,⁸ and on Virgin Atlantic Airways,⁹ thus forging a strong presence in Britain’s popular culture.

In 2005, Divine enhanced its awareness-raising efforts around Ghana’s cocoa growers by commissioning a major advertising campaign that featured women who belonged to the Kuapa Kokoo cooperative.¹⁰ A team from the London-based advertising agency St. Luke’s¹¹ travelled to Ghana to conduct the shoot according to the chosen theme, ‘women with attitude’. Several women were selected from the Kuapa Kokoo community to appear in the advertisements, including Beatrice Mambi, Priscilla Agyemeng, Rita Nimako, and Naomi Amankwaa (Figures 1–5). Divine Chocolate and St. Luke’s supplied the women’s outfits and gave them a stipend to have

Figure 3. Divine Chocolate advertisement featuring Priscilla Agyemeng. Source: Reprinted with permission from Divine Chocolate. Photograph by Freddie Helwig and St. Luke’s advertising agency.
their hair styled for the shoot; the women were also compensated for the time they spent modelling.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{African women: Exotic icons of traditional cultures}

Emerging from Victorian-era political and business strategies to fashion an uncivilized Other out of the colonial landscape, against which to measure the colonial Self as civilized (Landau and Kaspin 2002; McClintock 1995; Brantlinger 1988), images of African people as archetypes of primitivism predominated in Western media during the twentieth century. In their study of the magazine and its imagery, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins (1993) argue that \textit{National Geographic} magazine draws upon this representational strategy, even as it celebrates the cultural accomplishments of the so-called ‘exotic’ places of the world. To its significant credit, the National Geographic franchise has brought Africa into unparalleled visual prominence for viewers outside the continent, especially in North America, by portraying Africa’s cultures and customs in visually stunning formats.\textsuperscript{13} The magazine’s purpose is not to act as purveyor of the continent’s ‘troubles’, but to display its cultural ‘curiosities’ (Keim 2009). In the talented hands of its photographers and videographers, the magazine and its affiliated outlets portray a land populated by exotic tribes, whose quaint and often colourful cultural spectacles seem continually on the verge of dying out.
But *National Geographic*’s imagery of African people also fits neatly with the dualisms of the modernity narrative, in which people must be *either* traditional or modern. Tribal life, as beautifully as it is rendered, appears static: members do not innovate, but instead seem to be willing participants in an indeterminate past. Frequent portrayals of black Africans using the ‘simple tools’ of a ‘traditional’ economy suggest that they inhabit a pre-industrial landscape (Lutz and Collins 1993), untouched by and unrelated to the manufacturing dynamism that their own exports so often fuel.

African women especially appear as visual icons of tribal cultures that the franchise works so hard to preserve. Photographs of African women, sometimes with their breasts exposed, position women as close to nature, and responsible for both the reproductive and productive labour of a tribe’s ‘traditional’ economy (Lutz and Collins 1993). Figure 6 is a recent example of this imagery. Procured from the *National Geographic* website, it shows two women farm workers from Botswana, likely from the San ethnic group (the website uses the term ‘Bushmen’) gathering food, accompanied by a young child and a sleeping baby strapped to one woman’s back. The text tells readers that gathering used to provide for 70% of the San’s subsistence, but today, due to the conversion of ‘ancient scrubland’ into cattle ranches, ‘government relief provides the bulk of the people’s food’. Nevertheless, these women ‘still go into the bush to gossip and snack on wild plants’.

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Figure 5. Divine Chocolate advertisement featuring Naomi Amankwaa.
*Source:* Reprinted with permission from Divine Chocolate. Photograph by Freddie Helwig and St. Luke’s advertising agency.
National Geographic does not take explicit political positions. Yet there is an undertone of critique of the changes that cattle ranchers – symbols of an international agro-industrial food system – have wrought on Botswana’s landscape, and the text implies that conversion of land to ranches is the reason why the San now depend on state aid. Yet even as the magazine quietly condemns the loss of ‘ancient scrublands’, it shows viewers that San women continue to gather food from the untouched bits of scrubland that remain. Indeed, the photographer has captured one woman in the act of tasting a gathered plant, pressing a weed-like stem to her lips, while her companion shakes a forefinger at an unseen spectator (perhaps a cattle rancher), her mouth open in apparent admonishment. The message is that these women continue to use – and defend – their fertile land, because they alone recognize it as a valuable source of sustenance. Together, the women form a repository of ancient food-gathering knowledge.

The presence of children conveys essentialist notions of African women’s reproductive capacity and responsibility (see Kabeer 1994). But in contrast to images of undernourished children that often denote the poverty of the continent’s food supply, these San women are able to feed their families well: both children appear hale and healthy, and the sleeping baby is even plump. While their clothes suggest access to industrially produced textiles, once hailed by postcolonial states as proof that African people had become ‘civilized’ according to the modernity narrative (Talton 2009; Allman 2004), the image and text suggest that these women insist on their right to remain in a more ‘primitive’ time – that if left well enough alone, they will continue to extract nourishment from the remaining tracts of scrubland. The viewer is invited to trust their industriousness and knowledge, and to wish that the San prevail over the cattle ranchers, finding a way to feed themselves once again without government handouts.

Breaking with the past: Ghana’s cosmopolitan farmers

The Divine Chocolate advertisements make a bold break with such anachronistic representations, as the visual and textual elements put forth Ghanaian women farmers as cosmopolitan participants in transnational trade exchanges. In the background of each advertisement, slightly out of focus, is
‘Africa’, represented by images of Ghana’s agricultural economy: cocoa drying tables, plantain trees, coconut trees, mud buildings, and dusty roads. In the foreground stands each woman, her image crisp, clear, and shiny. Below the playful title in the upper corner (‘Equality Treat’, ‘Decadently Decent’, or ‘Serious Chocolate Appeal’) is a small but crucial textual element: three lines that name the featured woman as a member of Kuapa Kokoo, and the cooperative as owner of Divine Chocolate. This text tells viewers that not only are these women cocoa farmers, they are part owners of the company that sells chocolate bars.

Although the women are farmers, they are not shown farming cocoa. Instead, they hold pieces of chocolate – the luxury food made from the fruit that they grow. In contrast to prolific representations of commodity chains that divide the global population into poor but hardworking Southern ‘producers’ and rich Northern ‘consumers’ (Ramamurthy 2003), the Divine women have access to the value-added product. Pairing images of the women holding chocolate with titles such as ‘Equality Treat’ and ‘Decadently Decent’ suggests to viewers that their own enjoyment of Divine bars should come not only from the pleasure of eating chocolate, but from the fact that these women also enjoy it. In contrast to representations of producers as exclusively growing raw materials, here the ‘equality’ of trade extends to consumption: Kuapa Kokoo farmers have chocolate too.

Though viewers outside Africa seldom see them in this role, the Divine women’s overt consumption of luxury goods is neither new nor unique among West African women. Emmanuel Akyeampong (2000) has noted that while few achieved it, colonial Asante women could accumulate significant wealth independently of male-dominated export systems, and theorized the female *obirempon*, or ‘big woman’, whose conspicuous displays of wealth, especially gold jewellery, rivalled that of Ghana’s ‘big men’. Conspicuous consumption also marks the contemporary Mama Benz figure of West African markets: women who generate great entrepreneurial wealth, particularly through success in the cloth trade (Junger 2002).

And yet there is a transnational element to the Divine women’s consumption that is not captured by either the female *obirempon* or Mama Benz. Taken together, their clothing and accessories, ownership of the British chocolate company, and access to chocolate portrays the Divine women as cosmopolitan individuals of the sort that Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) writes about in his birthplace of Kumasi, Ghana. Writing against the grain of globalization literature, which often suggests that the world is becoming more culturally homogenous (usually understood as ‘American’) with the increasing circulation of Western exports, Appiah argues that such ‘contamination’, as he calls it, actually fosters cultural dynamism. Individuals benefit from material innovations from abroad and choose for themselves whether and how to incorporate new goods and ideas into their lives; moreover, their interpretation of cultural, technical, or material imports can diverge significantly from standard homogenization narratives (see Chapter 7).

Following Appiah’s analysis, the Divine advertisements offer the possibility for readers of British magazines and newspapers to understand Ghanaian women cocoa farmers as active agents in the cocoa-chocolate trade, enjoying its benefits as part owners of the British chocolate company. In particular, their clothing and fashion suggest that they are cosmopolitan participants of this exchange. The stylization across the advert series is visually distant from portrayals of African women as bound to a parochial dress culture that harkens to a putatively ‘primitive’ or unclothed state (Allman 2004). But neither have the Divine women simply abandoned African fashions in favour of contemporary Western styles, as is the case in Africa’s pervasive secondhand clothing industry (Tranberg Hansen 2000; Oktan 2008). Following analyses by Victoria Rovine (2004) and Boatema Boateng (2004), the textiles and patterns in the Divine adverts are similar to those that have achieved global recognition as ‘African’, and viewers outside the continent likely read the women’s clothes as an indication
of their African fashion sensibility. And yet the overall effect of the textiles and poses (discussed further below) suggests a fashion also born of contact with foreign styles – that is, cosmopolitan.

Perhaps the best way to understand the cosmopolitanism of the women’s dress is to compare it with the alternatives available to the stylists on this shoot: dressing the women in Ghana’s renowned adinkra or kente cloths. Both are closely associated with the Asante people (though the Ewe also weave kente) and bear symbols denoting cultural values; kente especially is worn on ceremonial occasions, such as funerals, and has a legacy of royal adornment (Smith 1975; Hale 1970); it is also used to represent Ghanaian political nationalism (when Ghana joined the United Nations, for example, it presented the world’s largest piece of kente cloth as a gift). Adinkra patterns, printed onto cloth using a stamp made from a calabash shell, also reflect Asante culture. As such, both types of cloth would have appeared firmly rooted in Ghana’s cultural traditions, making it less likely that viewers of the advertisements in Britain would identify personally with the women’s fashion sensibility, and perhaps more apt to view their dress as ‘traditionally’ or unequivocally African. The women are also not wearing Ghana’s kaba-style three-piece wrap, likely for the same reason (Gott 2010).

The Divine women in fact wear Dutch wax print cloth, or a close derivative of it, draped over one shoulder (Figures 1 and 2) or tied sarong-style (Figures 3, 4, and 5), suggesting both African fashion and foreign influence. Within the Ghanaian context, this cloth would likely be understood as an expression of global fashion savvy, and its draping a vehicle for conveying a youthful, classy social status. Despite its ‘African’ appearance to viewers outside the continent, these textiles and dress styles are historically hybrid designs, the result of a transnational trade involving the fabric’s batik origins in Indonesia, its wax-print manufacture and marketing by Dutch companies, especially Vlisco, and its distribution and local adaptations across West Africa (Gott 2010; Junger 2002). Ghanaian women, especially in the urban Asante center of Kumasi, are renowned for their fashion sensibility (Gott 2010), and the women who posed for the adverts undoubtedly appreciated the cosmopolitanism of their outfits.

Moreover, the fact of posing for photographs in a fashionable style is consistent with West African traditions of portraiture as a means of self-expression. Hudita Mustafa (2002) has shown in her work on identity among Senegalese women that photographic portraits are a key site for fostering and maintaining cultural capital in urban, stylish Dakar. Though of a different fashion sensibility than the women in the Divine adverts, Mustafa’s interviewees stylized their bodies – through dress, hairstyles, accessories, and poses – to demonstrate propriety and elegance through photographic displays within Dakar’s female social circles. As Heike Behrend (2002) has written about a young man, Peter, in Kenya who posed insatiably for portraits, it is not necessary to own either the clothes or the photographs to build cultural capital. Peter’s albums were filled with portraits in poses of his own invention, but he did not keep them indefinitely; instead, he exchanged photographs with friends. What is important is that the photograph captures the moment of wearing fashionable clothes. The Divine women’s appearance in these adverts aligns with this tradition of portraiture, and they likely understood the act of wearing these styles for Divine Chocolate as a pronouncement of their social standing and enhancement of cultural capital.

The social status and mobility suggested by these cosmopolitan fashions reflect a close affiliation with the privileges of modernity and development narratives. Because the message of the adverts is ultimately that membership in Kuapa Kokoo – and, by extension, ownership of Divine Chocolate – is connected to the state of ‘development’ these women enjoy, I turn to a history of women’s roles in European development discourse. Featuring cosmopolitan women farmers as development icons suggests a reorientation of these development discourses.
A self-interested steward: Reorienting development goals for African women

In their writings on the history of development, Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton (1995) trace the major shifts of development theory articulated in Western paradigms. During the industrial revolution, ideas of development as cyclical regeneration – birth, maturity, decay, rebirth – gave way to the concept of development as a linear path, and the notion of development as immanent process was replaced by intentional practice. From that point, development was understood as the province of stewards or trustees with the vision and capability to develop the underdeveloped areas of the world; the first such trustees were bankers, who were seen as having the necessary pecuniary skills to utilize land, labour, and capital in the best interests of any society – a notion that continues to underlie major development schemes today, including those by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

A similar notion of stewardship operates across the Divine advertisement series, but with another celebrated trustee at its center. The fact that Divine chose to portray female farmers from Kuapa Kokoo aligns with scholarly, policy, and journalistic discourse that positions women as development trustees – not at the conceptual level, where economists and bankers remain in charge, but at the level of implementation. Anticipated in the nineteenth century as ideal stewards because of their prioritization of the ‘social’ over the ‘personal’ (Cowen and Shenton 1995, 34–5), women today are the chosen beneficiaries of development efforts for the same reason. They are considered the most effective students of primary and secondary schooling, because educated women have fewer and healthier children (Fritschel and Mohan 2001; Sen 1999). They are the most productive recipients of micro-lending, because they invest profits from personal business into the household and community (Dowla 2001; Mayoux 2001; Yunus 1997; Holcombe 1995). And women are the best stewards of the environment, because their purportedly close relationship with nature makes them ideal managers of natural resource use in the household, especially of water and fuel (FAO 2003; UN 2003a; UN 2003b; UNDP 2002).

This instrumentalist discourse has been accompanied and reinforced by positive and often inspirational images of hardworking, altruistic women in poor countries. Such imagery became prevalent in the late twentieth century and remains so into the twenty-first, especially in public outreach materials by development organizations. In Britain, for example, Oxfam International aid agency uses such imagery, presenting African women as leaders of progressive development schemes who use the appropriate technologies donated through Oxfam programmes to better their lives, those of their families, and the surrounding community.

Photographs on the Oxfam International website show African women at the vanguard of healthy, productive communities. In the section on Oxfam’s work in Zimbabwe, we see women using appropriate technologies to make both productive and reproductive labour cleaner and more efficient. In one image (Figure 7), Ntombizodwa Marufu shows viewers her new latrine, courtesy of Oxfam’s public health programme: ‘Because of Oxfam I’ve got a toilet at home’, she says in the caption. ‘The toilet is really smart, it’s a real inheritance, something to pass to the children.’ In another image (Figure 8), Ipaishe Masvingise waters her wheat crop by dipping into an earthy-red irrigation trough, supplied by Oxfam. The accompanying text notes that Zimbabwe’s political context has posed challenges to rural food security: ‘After years of political, economic and social turmoil, the Zimbabwean economy has begun to stabilise with food and other basic commodities now available. Yet high prices mean that people in rural areas still can’t afford food and unpredictable rains have made it harder to grow crops.’

The clear message is that these women are the recipients of Oxfam’s aid, not the (sometimes corrupt) governments they have to live with. The fact that the women are from Zimbabwe, where
Robert Mugabe’s policies have wreaked havoc on the country’s economy, underscores the point that Africans still can make good use of aid, even if their heads of state cannot.

The Divine advertisements do not displace the notion that women are ideal development stewards – but they do remodel it, by giving it a glamorous face and, crucially, reorienting development towards a new goal. The Divine women are visually distant from National Geographic’s tribal archetype and Oxfam’s appropriate technology leaders, because these advertisements perform a different function to those image types. National Geographic celebrates an exotic Other for Western-based viewers. Oxfam’s images compel viewers to donate money to women who are struggling to meet their basic needs. But the Divine advertisements sell chocolate bars.

As Sophi Tranchell explained, the adverts ‘need to show a positive image that makes you feel good’. 19 Though National Geographic and Oxfam images may ultimately result in a feeling of ‘goodness’ for the viewer, I interpret Tranchell’s statement as meaning viewers must feel good enough to buy chocolate – a luxury item, associated in contemporary European and North American cultures with romantic love, personal indulgence, and festive occasions. As adverts, the images must offer visual evidence that Ghanaian women farmers maintain a lifestyle that

Figure 7. Ntombizodwa Marufu shows viewers her new latrine.

Source: Reprinted with permission from Oxfam GB. Photograph by Annie Bungeroth.
is consistent with these cultural norms in Britain. To convince viewers that this is indeed the case, when they have more likely seen a host of images that suggest just the opposite, the Divine advertisements show that the company’s relationship with Kuapa Kokoo has engendered a state of development that chocolate eaters might wish for themselves, rather than maintaining a developmental distance between viewer and farmer.

Unfettered by husband or children, the Divine women are never essentialized as reproductive labourers. As such, they do not seem responsible for anyone’s development but their own – a hugely different arrangement of responsibility for black African women, whose labour is often seen as instrumental to the uplift of family, community, or nation (Allman 2004; Mayoux 2001; Sen 1999). Rather, the Divine women are the most successful sorts of businesswomen. The text that names each woman as part owner of the chocolate company, and the stylization that expresses her cosmopolitan lifestyle, show the women as members of a transnational elite that benefits from global trade – rather than as exploited agricultural labourers. Through membership in Kuapa Kokoo, these Ghanaian women have become owners of the means of production of luxury goods in Britain. While capital ownership in Divine Chocolate is the development vehicle, the women seem to be savvy agents of change: their cosmopolitanism suggests they had the savoir faire to achieve success in what is typically a highly inequitable trade relation.

The notion that African women are the active agents of a self-gratifying transnational business arrangement subverts and displaces the tenacious insistence that African people – especially African women – have yet to ‘catch up’ with development in the West. The Divine women’s stylization suggests that they are already accustomed to enjoying luxuries associated with the privileged side of modernity narrative binaries, particularly industrial goods. In the following section, I suggest that the adverts as a whole subvert these powerful binaries, and challenge viewers to imagine a more dynamic and influential relationship between postcolonial African women, Africa, and the modernity narrative.
From cocoa to chocolate: Refashioning African modernity

The Divine advertisements challenge long-held assumptions about the teleos of modernity and Africa’s ‘underdevelopment’, and contest the tired stereotypes that Binyavanga Wainaina described in such grimly memorable terms in ‘How to Write about Africa’ (2005). The adverts push viewers perusing newspapers and women’s magazines in Britain to ‘frame’ Africa (Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie 2010) in a way that moves beyond the dualisms that hold Africa as primitive and backward, exotic and natural to Europe’s ‘civilized’ endpoint.

As Peter Geschiere, Birgit Meyer, and Peter Pels remind us, we will continually reproduce the philosophical constraints of modernity’s binary divisions ‘if we do not also understand modernity from Africa’ (2008, 4). Geschiere and his colleagues understand modernity as bound intimately with African history. ‘[L]ooked at from Africa’, they argue,

one cannot but place modernity in the context of the transatlantic trading of human beings for money. It was and is impossible to be modern in Africa without drawing on this heritage of slavery, whether it appears as the Pan-Africanist sources of African nationalism or as the popularity of rap music among today’s African youth. Both modern capitalism and the current meaning of the word ‘Africa’ derive in part from the ‘Black Atlantic’ (Geschiere, Meyer, and Pels 2008, 4).

Following this compelling analysis, surely we also cannot but ‘place modernity’ in the context of commodities that left the African continent to fuel industrialization in Europe. In this case, I am of course concerned with the trade of cocoa from West African farms to British chocolate factories. The widespread introduction of industrial bar chocolate into Britain would have looked quite different – if it happened at all – were it not for the astonishing rise in cocoa production in Ghana (then the Gold Coast) between 1890 and 1911, which rocketed the British colony from negligible production to the status of leading world exporter (Austin 1996). Though scholars have debated the relative impetus of colonial enforcement versus endemic enthusiasm for the new crop to explain the tremendous growth in cocoa production across West Africa (Allman and Tashjian 2000; Mikell 1989; Groff 1987; Hill 1963, 1956), Ghana’s rise was unquestionably dramatic and sustained. The major chocolate companies in Britain and the US – Cadbury, Hershey, Mars – rose to global dominance in part because Ghanaian farmers supplied them with vast quantities of superior cocoa beans. And though farmers in neighbouring Ivory Coast surpassed Ghana’s production levels by the 1980s (Nyanteng and Seini 2000; Hecht 1983), pushing Ghana into the number two producer spot, major chocolate companies still recognize Ghana as the source of the highest quality ‘bulk’ beans. The flavour of Ghanaian cocoa underlies the flavour of the world’s most popular chocolate brands.

In this brief historical materialist reading of the cocoa trade in West Africa and Europe, modern industrial chocolate is African – indeed, Ghanaian. Ghana’s cocoa has always been present in British chocolate bars, whether consumers know it or not. Many do not (Leissle 2008), but this is what the Divine advertisements strive to show. The images do not put forth the history of the cocoa trade as I have outlined it; instead, they represent Ghana – and by extension, Africa – as a foundation of modernity visually, in the figuration of the women’s bodies and their cosmopolitan fashion.

An analytical focus on the body is central to this argument. As Richa Nagar and her colleagues have argued persuasively (2002), when we look beyond the scale of the nation state in transnational feminist analyses – at bodies, individuals, households, or communities – we ‘see’, analytically, that women’s everyday endeavours and experiences, which are mostly ignored in the literature on globalization, indeed constitute globalized formations (of ideas, capital, etc.). Globalization does not only ‘happen’ at the prerogative of nation states or international financial institutions – or even non-governmental organizations like Oxfam. Transnational exchanges of goods, ideas, and capital are relational processes, enabled by specific and gendered interactions between,
for example, bodies and nation states, or households and communities – a point also made by Priti Ramamurthy (2004) in her analysis of *Land’s End* catalogue images of Madras cloth from India.²⁰

The Divine adverts force the scale of the body into view, reflecting this methodological priority (no doubt unintentionally) of Nagar et al., Ramamurthy, and others (Weinbaum et al. 2008; Barlow et al. 2005) in the marketing setting of an advertisement.

The Divine women have clearly fashioned their bodies using transnational goods and aesthetics. Unlike *National Geographic*’s women bedecked in colourful tribal dress or unclothed with bare breasts (Allman 2004), the Divine women wear alluring, factory made, wax-print cloth. Their perfectly coiffed hair and gleaming skin suggests a regime of bodily care, using industrially made soap and cream. They sport delicate gold and silver jewellery, as opposed to bright, hand-woven or beaded necklaces, lip and neck plates, or lobe-stretching earrings (with the exception of Naomi Amankwaa in Figure 5, who wears what appears to be a tightly woven or beaded bracelet).

Their posture, also key to a reading at the scale of the body, was guided by the ‘women with attitude’ theme of the advertisement series. Each woman rests one hand on her hip and raises her other arm to show off the chocolate. The pose is a sassy assertion of confidence, and it forces the women’s bodies to fill up the visual frame; Beatrice Mambi in Figure 2 and Rita Nimako in Figure 4 accomplish this particularly elegantly. This is in sharp contrast to typical advertising practices of diminishing, covering, and dismembering women’s bodies that feminist analysts have so forcefully criticized (Jhally 2000; Kilbourne 1999; Wolf 1991). At the same time, the poses clearly invite viewers to enjoy a piece of chocolate. The assertive postures are made playful by Beatrice Mambi’s sidelong glance in Figures 1 and 2; her head tilt in Figure 2; Priscilla Agyemeng’s seductive gaze in Figure 3; Rita Nimako’s whisper of a smile in Figure 4; and Naomi Amankwaa’s just-pursed lips and hip tilt in Figure 5.

The playfulness of their poses, combined with the invitation to enjoy chocolate, presents African women farmers as savvy luxury consumers, which suggests their individual participation in the privileged aspects of modernity narratives. Taken in their entirety, the adverts reframe *Africa* in its relationship to ‘modern’ goods and ideas. I read the images’ refashioning of Africa’s role in modernity in part through the scholarship on the figure of the Modern Girl, a key trope in advertising from the 1920s through the 1960s on four continents, including Africa (Weinbaum et al. 2008; Thomas 2006; Barlow et al. 2005).

The Modern Girl – a youthful, sexy, racially morphing figure, displayed again and again in advertisements for newly invented industrial products across diverse geopolitical contexts – was depicted as an attractive *consumer* of modern goods (everything from deodorant to light bulbs). But the Modern Girl also became a figure to which the *notion* of modernity was affixed: her constant presence in advertisements across Europe, North America, Africa, and Asia provided an alluring shape to which the idea of the ‘modern consumer’ could attach globally, and along with it the impetus for the actual transnational distribution and purchase of new or improved products. Similarly, the Divine women – cocoa farmers who appear in a fashionable, cosmopolitan aesthetic – provide visual evidence of African women’s participation in luxury consumption, while at the same time offering the *idea* that such African consumerism is possible, and inviting its repetition. As African modernity affixed to the figure of the Modern Girl in the twentieth century, so too do the Divine women offer an attractive visual image of Africa’s participation in transnational exchanges of capital and goods in the twenty-first.

The Modern Girl is a historical figure, however, theorized from the period between 1920s and the 1960s, and I do not read the Divine women as simply a twenty-first century iteration of her. The Modern Girl was clearly an advertising model, sometimes drawn or painted, while the Divine adverts name Beatrice Mambi, Priscilla Agyemeng, Rita Nimako, and Naomi Amankwaa as real women who belong to a cocoa farmers’ cooperative. And while their gleaming skin and alluring
adornment suggest a similar regime of bodily beautification using industrial goods, there is a different relationship between the Divine women and the background of these images than was typical of Modern Girl adverts. Modern Girls appeared in highly stylized settings – intimate places like boudoirs or bathrooms, glamorous parties, and classy sporting events. The Divine women, by contrast, appear against a rural, agricultural setting, sometimes with cocoa beans or dirt roads.

In the juxtaposition between the cosmopolitan cocoa farmers and the agricultural background lies the starkest transgression of modernity’s binaries: traditional/modern, primitive/civilized, underdeveloped/developed. The stylization of their bodies and individual cosmopolitan identities declare that the Divine women are consumers of luxury goods. Because the women are thus positioned as privileged figures in the modernity narrative, the commodity that they produce – cocoa – is also imbued with a modern valence. And because we can see quite clearly that a popular ‘British’ chocolate originates with glamorous Ghanaian women and their cocoa farms, we must ask whether modernity itself – symbolized in that alluring, sweet treat: chocolate – does not also issue from Africa.

In the background, Africa, in the crudest terms, still looks ‘underdeveloped’. As James Ferguson reminds us in his work in Zambia (1999) and elsewhere on the continent (2006), Africa yet has development and infrastructure challenges that need attention: corrugated, potholed, often flooded dirt roads are indeed ‘no cause for celebration’ (Ferguson 2008, 13) when transporting cocoa beans out of the bush, and it would be better for growers, truck drivers, exporters, and all the rest if the roads were paved. But because the Divine adverts alter the temporal narrative that portrays African women as symbols of a civilizational lag, and instead depict them as contemporary luxury consumers and capital owners, it becomes much more difficult to locate the ‘African’ roads, plantain trees, or cocoa drying tables behind them in a primitive, underdeveloped past – the ‘exotic time’ that Anne McClintock finds in Victorian advertisements that used African imagery (1995). Ghana’s agricultural economy surely needs infrastructure and investment, but it is nevertheless a prolific site of luxury production and consumption.

To see the Divine women and ‘African’ background as mutually constitutive suggests that Africa plays a crucial role in the production and exchange of modern luxury goods – chocolate, not just cocoa – and therefore raises the question of whether typical Western representations of Africa as underdeveloped and primitive tell the full story. Where, exactly, does Africa lie on the primitive/modern divide in these adverts? The roads, mud structures, and agricultural implements that more commonly signify ‘primitive’ time are here less easily attached to the idea of a developmental gap. Within discourses of development and modernity that cast Africa as a place from which raw materials, cheap commodities, and agricultural exports flow uninhibited to satisfy the privileged tastes of Europeans – and the place towards which aid travels – these advertisements stage a bold and innovative discursive break, suggesting that it is in fact glamorous, sweets-eating, capital-owning, fashionable Ghanaian women who lie at the heart of that piece of chocolate.

**Conclusion**

The obvious point in analysing the Divine advertisements as I have done is that, in the end, they are adverts – and while flipping through a magazine or newspaper, readers are likely to spend just a few moments looking at the images, no matter how attractive they are. I do not suggest that this advertisement series alone engendered widespread acknowledgement in Britain (or anywhere) of African women as being at the vanguard of globalized luxury consumption. Moreover, of course, not all farmers in Ghana have the wherewithal to dress as the women did for this shoot, nor do Beatrice, Rita, Naomi, or Priscilla probably pursue this cosmopolitan look in every aspect of
their lives. But neither do the people who viewed the adverts in Britain – although no doubt they too fashion themselves glamorously from time to time. The images reflect the fact that women in Ghana also live multi-faceted lives – indeed they do farm, but they are also businesswomen, wear attractive clothes, beautify their bodies with industrial accessories, and assert their roles in transnational (or local) market exchanges. In short, the images disrupt narratives that would always cast African women as occupying an undesirable, unchanging cultural space.

The ‘Western gaze’ that I analyse here is neither homogenous nor static. If nothing else, the presence of West African diasporic communities in Britain ensured a heterogenous reception of these images. While I have not made a systematic analysis of their responses, when West African men and women view the images during my presentations of them, they most often use the adjective ‘smart’ to describe the Divine women, seeing in them a representation of elegance and gentility much like that portrayed by the Dakarois women in Hudita Mustafa’s analysis of photographic portraits (2002). While many undoubtedly do not share this interpretation, it is certain that where the images circulated, they opened up new spaces for all viewers to engage with Africa. Perhaps readers of the women’s magazines, primed to think about bodily adornment, understood that women in Africa also enjoy wearing fashionable accessories and clothing, thus forging an identity connection with them. Perhaps the fact that women farmers in Ghana were holding pieces of chocolate suggested a common love of the sweet. Without championing essentialist global sisterhood models of women’s solidarity, we can still welcome images of African women that appeal to the socially upbeat aspects of feminized cultural norms.

The adverts’ presence in magazines and newspapers in Britain suggests that tenacious imagery of women as an exotic primitive archetype can give way to something more dynamic, cosmopolitan, and realistic of African women’s lives. Indeed, the adverts suggest a new goal for development: African women’s individual pleasure and material enjoyment. Divine Chocolate strove for a break with traditional representations of African women when it chose ‘women with attitude’ as the theme for its campaign. The ‘attitude’, which I have analysed in the women’s clothing, poses, and accessorizing, moves beyond the idea that African women labour to put development aid or technologies to their best use. The Divine women reveal what might lie beyond all that hard work: a personal moment of luxurious indulgence. Though many indeed do not enjoy it, African luxury consumption of course exists – in my own research in Ghana, even those who had only occasional access to chocolate still valued and exchanged it as a token of friendship or romance, especially the youthful urban residents who displayed much the same cosmopolitanism as the Divine women (Leissle 2008). The adverts represent that contemporary African consumer reality, and imagine its future.

The Divine advertisements make a valuable contribution to British print media and popular culture by moving beyond the tenacious modernity binaries that have been so harmful to Africa and its people. They present fresh and hopeful imagery of African women to chocolate lovers in Britain, and no doubt gave many pause for thought the next time they reached for a bar.

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Notes

2. Personal communication, August 2012.
12. Personal communication, Sophi Tranchell, August 2012.
19. Personal communication, August 2012.
20. My analysis of the Divine advertisements is indebted to Ramamurthy’s reading of the Land’s End images.

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