

Action and Reaction: An Overview of the Ding Dong Relationship between the Colonial Government and the People of Cape Coast

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the western educated elite of Cape Coast as a factor of change regarding their influence on the traditional political institutions. It also examines the processes by which institutions like the Asafo, a typical traditional military unit, were virtually drawn into national politics as it pertained in Cape Coast. Much as the Asafo retained their fundamental structures as a traditional institution their time-honoured roles took on a more modern dimension. It was a veritable case of the Asafo approaching the precipices of a pressure group, and as it were, being drawn into the colonial political dynamism.

Keywords: colonialism, Asafo

1. INTRODUCTION

Cape Coast, the administrative capital of the Central Region of Ghana, covers some 43.6 square miles of land.¹ Otherwise known as Oguaa (Guaa, Dwaa, Guae), the name Cape Coast is the anglicised rendering of the Portuguese name Carbo Corso (Ward 1967: 57). It has thirty-six satellite towns and villages under its ambit as the nerve centre of the Oguaa Traditional Area.²

Even though the actual date for the beginning of Cape Coast is uncertain, it is asserted that before the Portuguese intrusion (in the fifteenth century) into the land that was to be called Gold Coast, Oguaa (later to be called Cape Coast) was a Fetu fishing village.³ By the sixteenth century, the settlement was dotted with

¹ Or 112.924 sq. km (Survey Department, Regional Office, Cape Coast).

² PRAAD Adm. (11/1/1634). These include Efutu, Tandokrom Kubekyir, Bebianeha, Berase, Agona, Essiam, Sarman, Ankwase, Ekon, Amama (or Amamima), Apewosika, Kwesibra, Kokwadu, Swiwdu, Abora, Kakumdu, Mpeasem, Akotokyir, Ebrobonko, Amiyao, Dankokrom, Bisakrom, Oguakrom, Kyirakomfo (Beulah), Yayakwana, Pedu, Kwaproa, Ankafur, Esuekyir, Anto-Esuekyir, Sorafo, Mampong, Adisadar, Nkamfua and Amoanda.

³ In May 1674, for instance, the King of Fetu was given some pieces of cloth as payment on three ships which came to Cape Coast. At times he allowed several months to elapse before collecting the rent in order to have a large sum of money to purchase many goods. See Daaku (1970: 65) and Dickson (1969: 65).

twenty odd houses.⁴ By the middle of the seventeenth century the small town had seen considerable growth. The number of houses increased from twenty to about five hundred (Arhin 1995: 2). This was a clear effect of the impact of trade with the Europeans. The introduction of new articles of trade and the consequent diversification of trade caused an appreciable influx of people from the immediate vicinity of Cape Coast. With the increase of European activity, especially that of the English, from the mid seventeenth century, Cape Coast gradually became the most beautiful coastal town. (Hyland 1995: 164) Hitherto relations between the people of Cape Coast and the English as well as the other Europeans were governed simply by commercial interests. The Europeans paid rent on their forts and depended on the goodwill of the hosts for the advancement of trade. They often co-operated with the people of Cape Coast to ward off invaders, especially the Asante. This was to protect trade.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel sent Philip Quaque to England to be educated as a missionary to work in his country. He was sent in the company of two others who died abroad. Quaque returned as the first of any non-European (at least since the Reformation) to receive ordination in the Anglican Communion. (Bartels 1955: 153-177) He, by his work, laid the foundations of formal education in Cape Coast; and significantly enough in the entire country as well. Philip Quaque's main contribution was in the re-establishment of the Castle School, which collapsed after it had been started in 1750 by the Reverend Thomas Thompson, the first resident English Minister in Cape Coast. The number of schools increased in the nineteenth century with the commencement of missionary work by the Wesleyan Missionary Society in 1835. (Bartels 1955: 153-177) Their commitment to evangelism from scratch necessitated the encouragement of educational work. In order for their converts to enjoy the new religious experience, and to have a qualitative Christian growth and development, they as a matter of course had to be able to read and write. This vision with time resulted in the establishment of the Wesleyan Collegiate School in 1876.

The nineteenth century also saw the gradual expansion of British authority in Cape Coast. Up to 1821, the forts had been administered by the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa. Their officers on the coast had no jurisdiction, either civil or criminal. In 1821 the British Government assumed control of the forts but withdrew in 1828. This was on account of the great expense but little profit derived from upholding them. The responsibilities of the Crown were transferred to a committee of merchants in London, and the local administration was entrusted to the Council of Merchants at Cape Coast. Several of the British traders on the coast were appointed Justices of the Peace for the trial of cases arising within the walls of the forts. Beyond these they had no authority or jurisdiction. (Kimble 1963: 330) But, after George Maclean became President of the Council in 1830, cases were increasingly brought to Cape Coast from the surrounding territories. The Crown resumed control of the settlements in 1843

⁴ Captain Towerson as cited in Claridge (1964: 65).

and Maclean was given the post of Judicial Assessor to the Chiefs. The Judicial Assessor was to sit with the Chiefs on weightier cases. (Fage 1955)

The next stage of the expansion of British power and influence was the bond of 1844, the first of a succession of treaties under which certain Gold Coast Chiefs acknowledged the power and jurisdiction of the Crown. As a result they gave their formal consent to the trial of criminal cases 'before the Queen's judicial officers and the chiefs of the district, with a view to moulding the customs of the country to the general principles of British law' (Kimble 1963: 194). It was signed by eight Fante chiefs, including King Joseph Aggrey of Cape Coast. With time there grew a small number of educated elite in Cape Coast, who, as it were, were alarmed by the extension of British judicial and administrative influence.⁵ This they observed contradicted the promises of self-government being talked about in Britain. To the educated members of the Cape Coast population, the imperceptible extension of British power was contrary to the decision of the Select Committee of 1865. They went on to give this dissatisfaction a more cogent expression. These men realised that to do so required combining the ideas of self-government, which the Select Committee had raised, with a more aggressive assertion of their traditional institutions and customs. Most of all they realised that self-government would have to come within the framework of traditional institution. (Gocking 1981: 111)

The installation of King John Aggrey in 1865 provided the initial impetus for the open challenge to the British administration in Cape Coast.⁶ This enabled the educated people to support the traditional order and use its institutions to check what they considered the arbitrary expansion of British authority. Aggrey, with the support of these men, clashed with the Governor over the status of his court. In the tension that was generated Aggrey became defiant in his correspondence with the Governor, questioning the basis of his authority over him and his people. These letters were regarded as 'very seditious' and the Governor caused Aggrey's arrest and consequent exile to Sierra Leone.

Aggrey's exile and eventual deposition abated the challenge for a while. Governor Conran abolished the position of King because he saw it as 'a source of potential trouble in a civilised place as Cape Coast.'⁷ Thus when Kwesi Atta became the ruler of Cape Coast, the Governor recognised him as the 'headman'

⁵ These included people like Barnes, Smith, deGraft and Hughes. They were also worried by the challenge posed by metropolitan firms to African commercial institutions and the expanded European presence in the town.

⁶ King Aggrey was an educated man and was also referred to as the Christian King of Cape Coast. Aggrey surrounded himself with educated men who had European titles. John Martin became his most important advisor and had the title 'King's Magistrate.' James Robert Thompson was the 'Mayor of Cape Coast;' while H. C. Carr and Joseph Martin were sent to Britain as 'Special Commissioners' to give evidence before the Parliamentary Select Committee in 1865. King Aggrey also retained Charles Bannerman as his 'Professional Advisor' and appointed Thomas Hughes the 'Representative of the King and people of Cape Coast.' (Gocking 1981: 113-114).

⁷ Gocking (1981: 120). See also C.O. (96/74).

with clearly defined roles.⁸ In 1867, the British and the Dutch, for the purposes of administrative convenience, exchanged their forts and settlements on the Gold Coast. The Fante reaction to this was to form an assembly of Kings to ensure their security and independence. This became known as the Fante Confederation. The initiators of this Confederation were the educated people from Cape Coast, as well as other important coastal settlements like Winneba and Anomabu. (Gocking 1981: 120-121) In spite of the great opportunity and the potential of this Confederation to have their way, its chances were marred by serious inherent problems.⁹ By 1873, it was no more. The important thing about this Confederation, however, was the working relation that it encouraged between the Chiefs and the educated people.

In 1874, a system of British administration ensured long periods of peace, order and stability in the Gold Coast. The British and their coastal allies under the command of Sir Garnet Wolseley checked the Ashanti aggression towards the Fante States. The Fomena Treaty of 1874, which was later ratified in Cape Coast, became significant for the coastal states.¹⁰ The four years commencing with 1874 marked a crucial change in Britain's relations with the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast fort settlement became a Colony. This move indicated a final rejection of the policy of gradual withdrawal recommended by the 1865 Select Committee, and provided conditions for effective evangelical and educational work by the missionaries (Kimble 1963: 266-269). Another significant occurrence in the history of Cape Coast in particular and that of the Gold Coast in general, was the formation of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society in May, 1897. Though there is no doubt that it was the Crown Lands Bill of 1896 and the Lands Bill of 1897 that precipitated the formation of the Society, it should be emphasised that the land question was not its only preoccupation.¹¹ Its

⁸ Gocking (1981: 120-121). He was to be a medium of communication between the government and the native order, and at the same time he was to show deference to the British authority.

⁹ The Confederation failed because of disunity among the Fantes. They were only brought together because of the common threat. It was also seriously hampered by leadership squabbles. For a fuller account see Kimble (1963, Chapter VI: 222-261)

¹⁰ The Ashantis had for long been a threat to the coastal states. During the eighteenth century, they made little effort to approach the coast. But after that they started their crushing punitive expedition against the Fanti in 1807, they came into increasing conflict with the coastal states, and hence with the British. In spite of several subsequent quarrels over fugitives, and a warlike Ashanti expedition to Assin in 1853, the British managed to avoid further direct conflict for many years. But the inconclusive war of 1863-4 aroused Fante fears of the ability and willingness of the British to protect them; and these were not dispelled by the exchange of territories in 1868, which prompted them to form the Fante Confederation. See Kimble (1963: 266-269).

¹¹ It is important to note that the educated people who initiated the move to form the Society have been criticised as having ulterior motives. Some Colonial Government officials saw the Society as a mushroom growth fostered by mercenary land speculators. Kimble, however, indicates that the Society had its roots in the past. The long, chequered history of attempts to form associations among educated Africans, the growing tradition of protest against government actions, the conscious revival of respect for national traditions, especially since

other principal objectives were to protect the rights of the people of the Gold Coast at all times by traditional constitutional methods and above all 'foster in the rising generation a knowledge of their historical past and to encourage the study of the laws, customs and constitutions of their country to promote sound national educational policy.'¹²

It created a great interest in education among the people of Cape Coast. The few western educated people of the town came to the realisation that the Africans themselves had to take the lead in devising a system of education, which would suit their particular needs. They believed that education was the main purveyor of culture and for them to adopt indiscriminately a foreign educational system was a great disservice to their own culture. In 1902, Mensah Sarbah and other educated elite of Cape Coast founded the Mfantasi National Educational Fund for the purpose of establishing primary and secondary schools, where both liberal and technical subjects were to be studied. (Lynch 1968: xvi)

Indigenous studies were also to form an important part of the curriculum. That was, children were to be taught to read and write in Fante and it was hoped that a Fante literature would be established. Studies were also to be undertaken in Gold Coast history, literature and social institutions. (Lynch 1968: xvi) Sarbah and his associates did succeed in opening a school in Cape Coast in 1905, which was amalgamated with the Wesleyan Collegiate School under the new name, Mfantshipim (Boahen 1996: 119).

These attempts at providing education for the people of Cape Coast yielded results. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the town had the highest student population in the Gold Coast. For instance, in 1901, there were 1,620 students in Cape Coast as against 858 in Accra (Gold Coast Census Report 1901). In Cape Coast alone, within the same period, there were many people employed as teachers, clerks, catechists, sales assistants, shop keepers, etc. There were also a considerable presence of lawyers, merchants and other self-employed people.

Command over the three R's by the western-educated elite and the consequent ability to fathom and understand the labyrinthine business of government, placed the educated elite in the position of political workers and opposition leaders. They became spokesmen for the articulate expression of the people's legitimate complaints and grievances. Mensah Sarbah (1968a: 293), for instance, stated:

For all practical purposes, definite public opinion about the acts of the Government and Legislature emanates from the educated classes, and whenever the untaught masses study and examine political questions,

the foundation of the Mfantasi Amanbuhu Fekuw in 1889, and a deep-rooted reverence for land as the foundation of community life, all played a part in the emergence of this organisation. Kimble (1963: 330).

¹² The Gold Coast Leader (21 December, 1904); Lynch (1968: xvi-xvii).

which directly affect them ... they gain a great deal of their knowledge and ideas from what their privileged educated brethren tell them.

Furthermore, in Cape Coast, there was a proliferation of clubs and societies to enhance social commingling and common interest. A typical instance was the formation of the Try Company, a private literary club, in 1859 by J. P. Brown in conjunction with some of his friends.¹³ There was also the opening of a Reading Room in 1860, which was the first of its kind on the coast.¹⁴ The Gold Coast Debating Society was also formed with the intent of educating members on the principles and tenets of the science and art of debating and criticism (Kimble 1963: 330). Yet some more groups were inspired by ideas of self-help and mutual improvement. In 1895 for example, a small study circle of youths in Cape Coast, the Star of Peace Society, was formed.¹⁵ Another factor, which also encouraged social interaction and thereby increased the level of awareness, was the springing up of newspapers,¹⁶ which aimed at becoming the mouthpiece of popular opinion in Cape Coast and the Western Province (Kimble 1963: 331). The purpose of these newspapers was expressed in the following:

We shall always offer our adherence to the popular view of matters in so far as we can conscientiously believe that we are acting in their interest, advocating their rights but in instances where the rights and interests of the people are disregarded, and attempts are made to tamper with them, and to put them down with a high hand, we shall be found at our post, prepared to perform our duty fearlessly and independently, regardless of the frowns of King or Kaiser...¹⁷

That veritable warning was interpreted to include an uncompromising protection of time-honoured and revered African customs and institutions from heedless and wanton destruction by European officials (Lynch 1968: vii).

These developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engendered a cultural consciousness among educated Fantes, finding support

¹³ The Gold Coast Nation (8 April 1915).

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ The Gold Coast Aborigines (No. 35, 1899).

¹⁶ The remarkable ones among the lot included: *The West African Herald*, founded by Charles and Edmund Bannerman. *The Christian Messenger and Examiner*, edited by J. B. Freeman and the Rev. H. Wharton. *The Gold Coast Times*, which was launched by James Hutton Brew on 28 March, 1874. *The Western Echo* was a second journalistic effort of J. H. Brew, who was the editor with the support of his nephew, J. E. Casely-Hayford. *The Gold Coast Aborigines* was founded by the Gold Coast Aborigines Rights Protection Society (A.R.P.S.). It was managed and edited by Attoh Ahuma and the Rev. Egyir Asaam. *The Gold Coast Leader* was also identified with J. E. Casely-Hayford in conjunction with Herbert Brown and Dr. Savage. As one of the formidable and impressive newspapers, *The Gold Coast Leader* was published between December 1902 and 1934. The other newspapers were *The Gold Coast Methodist Times*, *The Gold Coast Methodist*, *The Gold Coast People* and *The Gold Coast Nation*.

¹⁷ The editorial of the maiden edition of *The Gold Coast Times* (28 March 1874).

among many of the uneducated people of Cape Coast as well. Consequently, the Mfantasi Amanbuhu Fekuw (The Fante National Political Society) was formed as an expression of dissatisfaction 'with the demoralising effects of certain European influence' (Lynch 1968: vii). In furtherance of this, there were attempts at the collection, discussion and compilation of proverbs, customs, traditional laws and institutions of the Fantes.¹⁸ Series of articles were written in this direction and published in the newspapers. The identification of the educated elite with the customs and institutions of their land made them win the confidence and trust of their people. This enhanced their authority and reputation. For instance, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all the seven Asafo companies of Cape Coast had western educated men as active members. Some of them were also in prominent leadership positions (PRAAD Adm. 11/1/1473).

R. Gocking (1981: chapter VIII) had an interesting view on the entry of the educated elite into what he termed the 'native order.' He indicated that as the native expanded in importance during the twenties the educated elite were increasingly attracted to positions within its ranks. Furthermore, Gocking stated that those who entered at first were on the fringes of the educated elite society; usually people with primary and secondary education, who also lacked professional qualification. He also added that invariably the people in this category had been unable to succeed in the commercial world, the main employer of educated Africans in the Colony. Gocking assigns reasons for this entry. One, their participation provided them with some financial reward. The alleged sources of revenue included what was due them for sitting on the traditional tribunal as members. Another source of revenue was from family stool lands. Two, traditional positions became prestigious because the Colonial Government awarded a more important role to it. Such office holders, according to Gocking, acquired recognized and fairly important positions in the affairs of their communities. Three, the educated elite who participated in the traditional order must have derived some psychological satisfaction from their new positions. Since they were better informed about local traditional institutions, they could challenge colonial officials on aspects of government policy towards the traditional order. (Gocking 1981: chapter VIII)

Their membership, thus, gave the Cape Coast Asafo a new lease of life in the area of leadership.¹⁹ A further proof of the confidence in the educated elite was that from the latter half of the nineteenth century, many chiefs anxiously sought the guidance of educated advisors to deal with chiefly matters as well as relations with the colonial government (Kimble 1963: 341-342). Furthermore, the chiefs and the Asafo leaders asked for preference to be given to 'the

¹⁸ Typical example of these attempts were J. Mensah Sarbah's books, *Fanti National Constitution* (1968a) and *Fanti Customary Laws* (1968b).

¹⁹ Gocking for instance indicated that, during the 1890s, opportunities for Asafo leadership increased as colonial officials came increasingly to depend on native authority figures in the littoral towns. Those, however who had some Western education, stood most to benefit, as they could communicate far better with British officials in carrying out their wishes.

educated Natives fit for Government appointments or employment' (C.O. 96/94). Thus western education did not entirely succeed in alienating all the educated people of Cape Coast from their culture. On the contrary some of them took pride in it and yet a considerable number of them participated in the Asafo organisation (Minnah 1998). This further influenced the relationship between the leaders and people of Cape Coast and the British Administration.

Mutual suspicion marked this relationship. The intellectual ferment in Cape Coast led to a situation where every policy or action of the British Administration was subjected to criticism.²⁰ Consequently, the town came to exert a great political influence over the surrounding towns and villages in the Colony.²¹ With this growing influence, Cape Coast led the opposition against the British encroachment on the coastal states throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1852, for instance, when the Poll Tax Ordinance was introduced, Cape Coast led the campaign against it with riots and disturbances, which led to the withdrawal of the Ordinance in 1861. Furthermore, when the Pine Administration introduced an impost of a two-pound tax on all traders in wine and spirits, the chiefs of Cape Coast strongly opposed it because they were not consulted. (Kimble 1963: 349) Again in 1865, King Aggrey of Cape Coast, had to suffer deportation to Sierra Leone because he challenged the government on decisions of his court being referred to British courts on appeal.²²

2. AN OLD PORT LEFT BEHIND THE RAIL TRACKS

Developments on the economic scene also influenced the relationship between the people of Cape Coast and the British Administration. The History of Cape Coast was closely connected with its position as a market that linked the European trading establishments with traders from the interior territories, the forest and savannah regions and beyond them to the Niger and the Sahel (Arhin 1995: 2). This, it is claimed, had a great deal to do with the vernacular name of Cape Coast, *Oguaa*.²³ Before the trade with the Europeans, there was some form of trade between the Great Fetu Kingdom and the town of Ooegwa. Traders from the former carried corn, oil and palm wine to the latter town in exchange for fish and salt (Bosman 1705: 48). The arrival of the Europeans not only increased the volume of trade, but also diversified it. In 1652, a Swedish Company built a fortified lodge near the site of the present Castle, but shortly afterwards they were driven out by the Danes who in turn lost their position to the English in 1662 (Ward 1967: 81-82). The Company of Royal African

²⁰ See the first public statement of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society published in *The Gold Coast Express* (22 April 1897). See also, Kimble (1963: 341-342).

²¹ It became their point of rally for discussion of crucial matters. See Kimble (1963: 349).

²² King Aggrey was referred to as one of the African political martyrs of British imperialism. See Lynch (1968: x).

²³ Apparently the Akan word for market is *Gua* (Fante) or *Dwa* (Twi).

Merchants, which took over the site from the Danes decided to make Cape Coast its main centre of operation. This company expanded the building's fortifications and eventually their Cape Coast headquarters became a Castle. The company, however, soon went bankrupt, but its successor, the Royal African Company continued to use Cape Coast as the centre of English trading operations on the coast. (Gocking 1981: 44)

Until the eighteenth century, gold was the principal export. Slaves were added. (Kea 1982) These were exchanged for imports such as: textiles, metals and metalwork, cutlery, weapons and other miscellaneous goods.²⁴ The wealth derived from the Slave Trade provided the opportunity for enterprising individuals to enhance their own standing at the expense of the King of Fetu. Of this group the most noteworthy was Edward William Barter, a mulatto who was able to amass into his hands all the trade in the town through his business acumen.²⁵ Another important figure in this category was Obrempong Kojo (Thompson 1758: 154) a successful slave supplier (Claridge 1964).

The number of merchants that could engage in trade was restricted by the chartered companies, which enjoyed a monopoly on the coast. In 1750, this began to change in the British areas as Parliament revoked the charter of the Royal African Company (Ward 1967: 144). From then onwards merchants could trade in this area so long as they paid the British a small tax. Many among this new generation of traders settled for long periods on the coast. They lived with African, or better still, local women and established families.²⁶

In 1828, when the British Government decided to abandon the Gold Coast settlements, British merchants who traded in this area protested vehemently and were permitted to take over the management along with a small grant from the government to meet the cost of administration. This group was responsible for appointing Maclean in 1830 to be the President of the Council that was to undertake local administration. He remained in office until the British Government took over full control of the area in 1843. (Crooks 1923: 251-260) As the Administrator of the area, Maclean saw his main task as one of restoring peace, which the war between the Asante and the coastal states in the first three of the century had disrupted.

²⁴ Textiles: thin silk cloths or taffetas, nap or pile cloths, linens, woollen cloths of different kinds, carpets. Metal and metalwork: iron bars, axes and hatchets, spades, copper basins of different forms and sizes, copper pots and buckets, tin ware (pots, pans, etc.). Cutlery and weapons: match lock and firelock, muskets, gunpowder, knives of different sorts, cutlasses. Miscellaneous: beads and coral, earthenware, mirrors, hats, shirts and leather bags. See Kea (1982: 207-208).

²⁵ Bosman (1705: 51). His career was very similar to that of his counterparts John Kabes and John Konny of Kommenda, 18 miles to the West of Cape Coast. See Daaku (1970: 115-127) and Henige (1977: 1-19).

²⁶ The best known of these coastal families was the Brew family, originally of Anomabu, as it has been studied at length by Priestly (1969). The Swanzy family was another important one (Swanzy 1956: 87-120).

When the European merchants left they were replaced by local traders who were their relatives. Many members of this new generation of traders had been educated in the Castle School and were both literate and sometimes Christians. (Gocking 1981: 64) Although some of these traders had inherited their businesses from their European fathers, others, however, entered trade on their own initiative. Many took advantage of their western education and contact with European society to become the local agents for metropolitan firms, which were expanding their operations on the Gold Coast.²⁷ Trading remained the most important activity of this group. This was especially so when in the fifties the Methodist mission linked Christian proselytising with educational work. In Cape Coast, this meant more educational opportunity than there had been previously and resulted in 'a steady stream of educated Africans who were eager to enter trade' (C.O. 96/17).

By the eighteenth century, Cape Coast had become one of the few termini of the great trade routes that brought the wealth of the interior to the coast. By the nineteenth, Cape Coast was a fairly prosperous town. It became the headquarters of English possessions on the Gold Coast. As the main port of call in the absence of harbours, the sailing ships anchored out some safe distance at sea, while canoes battled their way through heavy breakers to reach them. (Dickson 1969: 65) This created some form of lucrative canoe men as well as other people who had the expertise in conveying exports and imports to and from the waiting ships. Nor was this all, in the absence of rail and road transport, goods had to be conveyed by head portage over narrow bush parts. This offered financial promise to the people of Cape Coast and their neighbours. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the introduction of legitimate trade led to commercial farming in the interior of the Gold Coast, Cape Coast also benefited.²⁸ A lot of these exports were carried through Cape Coast.²⁹ The boom in the cocoa industry in the first and second decades of the twentieth century also intensified activities in the ports. Some of the imports into the Gold Coast were also carried through the Cape Coast port within the same period.³⁰ It was

²⁷ A number of these firms had been started by independent merchants in the late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century and had done well enough that their original founders had been able to retire to Britain. In order to run their Gold Coast operations, their owners employed Africans. See Reynolds (1974: 80).

²⁸ The legitimate trade was the name given to the trade in palm oil, rubber, cocoa, palm kernel, animal skins, kola nuts and other agricultural produce that came to replace the slave trade.

²⁹ There were nine main port towns in the Gold Coast. These were Half Assini, Axim, Sekondi, Cape Coast, Saltpond, Winneba, Accra, Ada and Keta.

³⁰ These imports included agricultural and gardening implements; ale, beer and porter; apparel, wearing (including boots, caps, shoes and hats.); bags and sacks, beef and pork; brass and copperware; bread and biscuits; building materials, cement and lime; enamelware, flour. Firearms: flintlock guns and ammunition; furniture; glassware, hardware and cutlery. There were also machinery, mineral and aerated waters, oils; kerosene and other lubricating oils; perfumery, provisions, rice, silk goods, spirits. Tobacco (manufactured): cigars, cigarettes;

the fourth principal port and about five percent of the Gold Coast imports and exports were carried through it in the 1920s.³¹

People from the neighbouring coastal towns as well as the interior came to seek employment mainly as carriers. The 1901 population census report intimated a heavy presence of people employed as load carriers: 'in a district like Cape Coast where so many carriers are employed' (Gold Coast Census Report 1901: 6). The evidence of trade in Cape Coast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was also seen in the presence of commercial firms like the Royal African Company, F. and A. Swanzy and the Elder Dempster Lines which did large scale and highly successful business (Swanzy 1965: 87). This period in the development of Cape Coast was described as the phase of 'mercantile capitalism'. It developed into one of the trading posts along the West African coast. (Hinderink and Sterkenburg 1975) Besides the European commercial presence, there were also government departments and local commercial firms. This kindled in the people some form of commercial enthusiasm. Trade became the main occupation of the people of Cape Coast. This is seen in the following statement:

of the acquired occupations of the people, it will be seen that trading is the predominant element; Cape Coast the oldest civilised town, leading the list with 30.29 per cent of its classified population followed by Accra with 24.04 per cent. (Gold Coast Census Report 1891: 13)

But this progress was not to last for long. The introduction of the railway into the Gold Coast was to deal a deadly blow to Cape Coast as one of the centres of trade in the Gold Coast. In 1894, the British Chamber of Commerce started pushing for better railways and roads in the Gold Coast. The Railway Ordinance enacted in 1898 empowered the Gold Coast colonial administration to acquire land for tracks and stations. That very year railway construction began at Sekondi. (Gold Coast Census Report 1891: 35) Further expansion of the infrastructure took place in the 1920s under Governor Gordon Guggisberg with the intention of providing transport and harbour facilities.

The construction of the Central Province Railway line from Huni Valley through Fosu to Kade in 1927 further endangered the prosperity of Cape Coast. When that scheme was proposed in 1922, the Chiefs and people of Cape Coast, as well as the members of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, demanded that the line be either linked with Cape Coast or the town be made the major terminus³² (Report of the Central Province Trade Routes Committee, 1928-1929). They expressed the obvious foreboding that if their town was put behind the line or rather side stepped, it would ruin that ancient commercial centre.

tobacco, (unmanufactured). Vehicles: motor cars and lorries and parts; wines, etc. (Gold Coast Gazette Trade Supplement, 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1928).

³¹ Trade Statistics- Principal Articles exported from/ imported to each port of the Gold Coast Colony, 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1928. (Gold Coast Gazette Trade Supplement, 1922-1928: tables and figures).

³² Report of the Central Province Trade Routes Committee (1928-1929).

Chief Coker, the Tufuhen of Cape Coast, at a meeting with the Governor in 1922, indicated that in the event of the town being sidetracked or bypassed by the proposed Central Province Railway the population of Cape Coast would be decimated and this was sure to ruin trade:

because all our principal cocoa comes from Anyinabrim and Fosu ... the distance between Yankumasi and Anyinabrim will not enable the Yankumasi people to bring in their cocoa to Cape Coast. So that unless the line starts from Cape Coast and ends at Cape Coast; Cape Coast will certainly be ruined.³³

But Governor Guggisberg insisted that the proposed railway would pass so far north of Cape Coast that it would not injure appreciably its trade³⁴.

In 1927, the line was completed according to plan and the consequences for Cape Coast were serious. All the cocoa from the region of Nsuaem and Kade were rail-lifted to Sekondi. The many carriers who carted cocoa to Cape Coast lost their jobs, as well as the boatmen who sent them to the waiting ships. And since cocoa was the chief export through the Cape Coast port, this situation started a gradual decline of the town as a commercial centre. Many of the firms, which thrived on the operation of the Cape Coast port, had to go where the economic pendulum swung i.e. to Sekondi and Accra. The Customs Department regional headquarters was transferred to Sekondi; so was the Elder Dempster Lines Agency. Cape Coast thus lost its part of the import and export trade. This no doubt affected its population. Between 1891 and 1911 the population stagnated³⁵ Even though subsequent report manifested increases of some sort, the population growth rate lagged clearly behind that of Accra, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi (Hinderink and Sterkenburg 1975: 38).

Certainly, the neglect of Cape Coast in the modernisation effort of the Gold Coast economic infrastructure did not improve relations between the colonial government and the chiefs and people of Cape Coast. The exclusion of Cape Coast from the benefits of the Railway Ordinance was seen, among the well-informed people, as an expression of hatred and dislike of the town on the part of the colonial government in general and that of Governor Guggisberg in particular. The Asafo also complained of unemployment among young men, often from poor families.³⁶ For instance, Tufuhen Coker claimed that Governor Rodger promised them a railway line at the Agricultural Show held at Cape Coast in 1907 (Extraordinary Gazette 40, 1907: 464). However, Guggisberg stood his ground and maintained that it was solely by reason of economy that the

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ In 1891 the population was 11,614; by 1911 it had fallen to 11,269. See Gold Coast Census Reports from 1891-1911.

³⁶ Fortescue also indicated that the building of railways and the arrival of the Ford truck threw substantial numbers of African head carriers out of work (Shelford 1928: 35; Clifford 1919: 249). Mechanization was only beginning (Robertson 1976: 132), but the first casualties of the process were undoubtedly appearing on the streets of Accra in the 1920s (Fortescue 1990).

town was not considered (Report of the Central Province Trade Routes Committee 1928-29). This situation created ill feelings on the part of the people of Cape Coast against the colonial government. For instance, there is a sense in which Cape Coast's resistance against the idea of direct local taxation proposed in 1929-30 was an expression of the people's sense of betrayal. This proposal was part of a comprehensive plan for reform of local administration as worked out by Governor Slater and W. J. A. Jones. (Simensen 1975: Vol. II, 237) This need to raise money came as a result of pressure from London to get the colonies to bear a larger share of the financial burdens of the empire. Central expenditure on local development was increasing, particularly, in the fields of education and sanitation; and it was argued that part of such burdens should be borne directly by the local population. It is interesting to note that even by the end of the 1920s the Gold Coast was the only British colony in Africa without any form of direct taxation, and the bid to introduce it around the end of the decade was most unacceptable to the people (Simensen 1975: Vol. II, 237). The decision to begin by introducing the Income Tax Ordinance was made so wide as to cover all persons with incomes of above forty pounds a year caused the entire proposal to backfire. The idea behind this approach was partly to bring some quick money to the treasury; but there was also a tactical consideration that singling out the wealthy of the country first could split the opposition to the taxation. The effect, however, proved to be exactly the opposite. The majority of the people of the Gold Coast banded together to fight against the tax. The coastal educated elite, who would have been hardest hit, led the campaign with slogans condemning exploitation and taxation without representation. There were strong protests from all the Provincial Councils and in some of the coastal towns the chiefs did not only mobilise their people for demonstrations by the use of gong-gong but joined delegations to the local British Commissioners. The campaign gained in effectiveness when members of the European Mercantile community joined it. The climax came at the end of October, 1931, when there were serious riots in Cape Coast and Sekondi. (Simensen 1975: Vol. II, 237)

Not surprisingly, Governor T. S. W. Thomas did intimate that it was not an injustice to say that for many years the people of Cape Coast had been regarded by colonial political officers as probably the most difficult to deal with in the whole of the colony. This was because their attitude towards government measures and policies had been unhelpful.

3. THE 'WESTERNIZATION' OF TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

As part of the process of 'westernising' the peoples of the Gold Coast, the Colonial Government introduced British political institutions. That process was, in part, a rationalisation of the traditional political set-ups. It also involved their fuller incorporation in the overall machinery of Government, under increasing

central control. (Simensen 1995) Policies and ordinances were to become the foundation upon which political institutions were to rest. One such ordinance was the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance (NJO)³⁷, which was conceived as an instrument of control to be used to bolster up the traditional authority of chiefs under the Indirect Rule policy. The main principle of Indirect Rule was defined as that of adapting for the purposes of local government the institutions which the native peoples have evolved for themselves, so that they may develop in a constitutional manner from their own past, guided and restrained by the traditions and sanctions which they have inherited (moulded or modified as they may be on the advice of British Officers) and by the general advice and control of those officers (Morris and Read 1972: 3).

It was an attempt to make Chiefs ‘a living part of the machinery of Government’. The Chiefs, ‘subject to the guidance and advice of the Political Officer’ were to be given greater responsibilities for implementing central Government policies, and were to be encouraged to initiate local development (Stone 1995: 120). It was so clear that while attempting to introduce western political institutions, British colonial policy acknowledged the importance that the traditional political elite could play. The educated were either sidelined or did not matter so much. For this system to take off smoothly, there was, as already indicated, the need to rework the machinery of Government by ensuring an increasing central control. In 1902 the government formalised its relationship with the Colony’s ‘native states’ by creating a secretariat for native affairs. The Governor appointed a Secretary of Native Affairs and provided him with a small staff of travelling assistants. The task of this agency was to represent the government in its dealings with the native states and to help settle succession questions, chiefly disputes and matters relating to the proper ordering of traditional authority. (Kimble 1963: 466; Gocking 1981: 184) Shortly afterwards, in 1904, the Government appointed Provincial Commissioners to be in charge of the three provinces into which it divided the colony. Cape Coast became the administrative centre of what was called the Central Province, and a Provincial Commissioner took up residence in the town.³⁸ As part of the process of structuring local government, Government officers began to use indigenous terminology to refer to office holders in the traditional order. (Gocking 1981: 184) During this early stage of Indirect Rule the Government’s political officers used the traditional order primarily to maintain discipline among its unruly members.³⁹

³⁷ The NJO (1883) has been variously described. It was seen as a ‘double purpose’ instrument of control, which was used on one hand to bolster up the traditional authority of docile ‘protected’ chiefs, and on the other, to hamstring chiefs deemed to be intractable and independent-minded. See Addo-Fening (1997: 101-123).

³⁸ The others were the Eastern and the Western Provinces, with the administrative centres being Koforidua and Sekondi respectively.

³⁹ R. L. Stone described the Indirect Rule in two stages. He argued that in the non-interventionist stage of Indirect Rule, Government officials were concerned with regulating the native state, while during the interventionist stage they were concerned with implementing

As part of the policy of strengthening the whole machinery of central Government formal recognition was accorded to the top hierarchy. In 1916, His Majesty the King constituted the office of Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Gold Coast Colony. He also provided for the establishment of a Legislative Council for the Colony, to make all necessary laws for the peace, order and good governance.⁴⁰ Similar developments occurred at the level of Local Government.

In Accra, Cape Coast and Sekondi, where the Municipal Corporations Ordinance (1924) was in force, provision was made for each representative to be elected by the electorate of the town.⁴¹ To settle doubts, disputes or grievances, the Order-in-Council (1925) allowed for the presentation of an election petition. A petition complaining of an undue return or undue election of a Member of the Council was to be lodged within one month from the date of publication of the result of the election to be presented with a Divisional Court of the Supreme Court of the Colony.⁴² The Order-in-Council (1925) also provided for the establishment of Provincial Councils. Among other responsibilities, the Provincial Councils were vested with the power of discharging functions occasionally assigned by Ordinance.⁴³

When the Order was published in the Gold Coast Colony Gazette at the end of 1925, the barrage of criticisms that greeted it was not limited to Cape Coast (Kimble 1963: 441). The major outcry was against the composition of the un-official African representation and the method of their election. The Council was to have a total membership of thirty; sixteen officials including the Governor, as President, and fourteen un-officials. In the latter group, five were to be Europeans and nine elected Africans. The African representation was to comprise three Municipal Members. These were to be elected directly, one from each of the main coastal towns of Accra, Cape Coast and Sekondi. The Provincial Members were to be six in number. These, as noted earlier, were to be elected from the three Provincial Councils of Chiefs. The Councils themselves consisted of the Head Chiefs whose headquarters were situated within the provinces. The Western Province was to be represented by one member; the Central Province by two, while the Eastern Province was to have

colonial policy through the chiefs 'to make the native order a living part of the machinery of government'. (Stone 1974) Actually this was how Governor Slater described this new policy in 1930. See *Native Administration in the Gold Coast and its Dependencies* (1930).

⁴⁰ The Council consisted of the Governor as President, together with fifteen Official Members (styled Ex-Officio Members) and fourteen Un-Official Members. The Un-Official Members of the Council consisted of the following: i. Six Provincial Members; namely, three for the Eastern Province, two for the Central Province and one for the Western Province. ii. Three Municipal Members, namely, one each for the coastal towns of Accra, Cape Coast and Sekondi respectively; and iii. Five European Un-Official Members, namely, a Mercantile Member, Mining Member and three European nominated Un-Official Members.

⁴¹ The electorate for this purpose was the same as that for the election of a member for the Municipal Council.

⁴² Gold Coast Colony (Legislative Council) Order-in-Council (1925: clause XXXII).

⁴³ *ibid.* (XVI-XVII: 26-27).

three.⁴⁴ It was this composition, which was most unacceptable to the educated and professional elite of the Gold Coast. The educated elite organised mass protest meetings at Cape Coast, Sekondi and Elmina (Kimble 1963: 443). At these gatherings they argued that it was contrary to native custom for natural rulers to attend the people in the Provincial Councils at all, let alone represent the people in the Legislative Council. In view of the condition in the Ordinance, which insisted on proficiency in the English language to allow for the taking of 'an active and intelligent part in the proceedings of the Council',⁴⁵ the educated class complained that the Chiefs who were actually qualified by education to sit on the Legislative Council could almost be numbered on the fingers of one hand. This, they feared, would enable the British to manipulate and turn them into mere tools in the adept hands of Government officials.

They also criticised the Order-in-Council, 1925, for what was called its divisive propensity. They saw it as a deliberate attempt on the part of the Colonial Government to create a division between the Chiefs and the educated classes with the former viewed as 'the true and accredited representatives of the illiterate masses' and the latter as some 'foreign breeds imported into the colony'. The educated elite insisted that co-operation would only be possible if the Government would allow the Oman Councils to elect suitable and progressive men other than, or in addition to, the Chiefs.⁴⁶ The significance of their stand was to send a message that professionals were an important element in colonial society and could not be ignored. Not only did the professionals have the legal training for functioning in the Legislative Council, but also in many cases they were, financially speaking, among the most successful in the African community (Gocking 1981: 294). This position was expressed in the following terms:

We and others have pointed out over and over again that the root objection to the present Provincial Councils lies in its being restricted to the Amanhin who have the right to vote for members to the Legislative Council from their ranks only. In other words ... freedom of choice as to the persons to serve in the Legislative Council would remove all the difficulties.⁴⁷

In furtherance of their opposition to the Order-in-Council 1925, the educated elite under the auspices of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society sent a Petition to London in 1926. The Petition of 1926, which was presented to the Colonial Office by Casely-Hayford, was a characteristically long document. It castigated the 1925 Order-in-Council for being most retrograde to the principle of liberalism in that it conferred only a restricted measure of elective representation. It also intimated that the Order in its essence affected the federal

⁴⁴ This was because of its linguistic composition. The Eastern Province had three main language groups: Ga-Adangbe, Ewe and Akan.

⁴⁵ Gold Coast Ordinance (No. 4 of XVIII).

⁴⁶ West Africa (10 April, 1926).

⁴⁷ The Gold Coast Leader (26 March, 1927).

union of the native states and the independence of Chiefs. The Order was seen as a violation of time-honoured customary law in its most vital parts and that its divisive tendency would result in the disintegration of the native states. (PRAAD Adm. 11 Series) Consequently they decided to boycott the Legislative Council.

The Government lost no time in reacting to the opposition to the Order-in-Council by the educated elite. The questioning of the educational qualification of the Chiefs was rejected as a 'sweeping and unnatural accusation by Africans against their natural rulers'. The Government intimated that it was a mere political argument. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45) The Governor speaking in the Council on 22 February, 1926 indicated:

Indeed when reading the criticisms one cannot help being struck by the probability that the Natural Rulers of this country should not be allowed to take a greater right to unite in consultation on the welfare of the people they administer than the Head Chiefs and their Councillors? And what people have a greater right to form the majority of the African Members of this Council than the Head Chiefs who rule over the vast bulk of the people of this country? It is true that the majority of the Head Chiefs in this country are not educated; but on the other hand there are a sufficient number with education enough to enable them to take part in the proceedings of this Council. Naturally, if the Head Chiefs and their Councillors wish to retain the opportunities and the positions, which the Government has given them, they will see to it that future generations of Chiefs and Councillors are educated.⁴⁸

The intelligentsia had to contend with the accusation that their sole object was to replace the Head Chiefs in the Legislative Council by their own members. They admitted that some of the Chiefs were educated all right, but did not consider that there were a sufficient number of those. H. S. Newlands retorted that in a way the same could be said of the intelligentsia themselves.⁴⁹ He opined that if both the Head Chiefs and the intelligentsia were deficient in numbers as regards educated men, then it was safer for the majority of the elected Africans on the Council to be drawn from that body which was most in touch with the life and needs of the overwhelming majority of the people of this country.

Guggisberg also pointed out that the African Member of the previous Council who possessed 'a sound knowledge of the English language, ability to express one's thoughts, in appropriate language, aptitude for debates, wide knowledge of the affairs of the world in the highest degree' was a Paramount

⁴⁸ Legislative Council Debates (February, 1926). The Governor, in his attempt to justify the presence of the Chiefs on the Council, further pointed out that in the composition of the Council at the time, the only African whose debates were cogent and formidable and who also was most well-informed about international events and could as well draw inferences from them was a Chief. He was no doubt referring to Nana Sir Ofori Atta, Omanhene of the Akyem Abuakwa traditional area.

⁴⁹ Newlands was the Acting Secretary of Native Affairs.

Chief. The Governor emphasised that his experience on the Council revealed that contributions made by Chiefs who had been members had been more helpful and informative than those of the other African Members. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45) He observed that while the criticisms of the other African Members were academic and consequently somewhat sterile, those of the Chiefs were essentially practical. The educated elite also made references to the inability of the Chiefs to hold their own in debates in the Council.⁵⁰ The Governor argued that debating power was very valuable, but not everything. He pointed out that he was yet to know any African Member of the Legislative Council, chief or educated elite, who could hold his own in debates against the Senior Officials such as the Colonial Secretary, Attorney General and others. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45)

In reaction to what the educated elite called the divisive propensity of the Order-in-Council 1925, the Colonial Government dabbled in what could be aptly described as reverse accusation by blaming the existence of any divisive tendency squarely on the Aborigines Rights Protection Society. The constitution, according to the Government, had the potential of bringing the states firmly together. It further argued that there was also no question of division between the Paramount Chiefs and their Sub Chiefs; and that everything showed that the Chiefs and the people themselves welcomed the Provincial Councils wholeheartedly. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45) The Governor pointed out that the bringing together of Head Chiefs and their advisers in a Council would help to remove jealousies and misunderstanding between them. This would rather promote co-operation. He further argued that whatever likelihood of division there was arose from the claim of the Petitioners that they were entitled to speak on behalf of the Chiefs and People of the Gold Coast Colony. This to all intents and purposes, was diametrically opposed to the claim and position of the chiefs as the Natural Rulers of the people. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45a)

H. S. Newlands, the Acting Secretary of Native Affairs, did a further discredit to the Petition. In his study of the document he reiterated that it was a minority view. The Petition was seen as the work of the executive committee of the Cape Coast section of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, which represented the educated communities of the coastal towns. The acting Secretary of Native Affairs torpedoed the claim that the Order-in-Council was a violation of native custom by arguing that it was rather the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, which held itself as the only political institution that infringed native custom by its interference with, and assertion of authority over the prerogative of the Head Chiefs. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45b) Newlands was also quick to point out that the Aborigines Rights Protection Society was losing support judging from the dwindling of signatures that appeared on its documents. Instead of signatures, what one saw were marks. It was explained to mean that the Society

⁵⁰ Paragraph 4, p. 17 of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society Petition (PRAAD Adm. 11 Series).

was appealing to mainly the uneducated chiefs, who could not seriously fathom what they had been made to thumbprint (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45b). This, Newlands explained to mean that the Petition did not have the full support of all the Chiefs of Gold Coast. In concluding his remarks on the Aborigines Rights Protection Society Petition, Mr Newlands observed that the document showed that neither the Society nor its adherents took its constitution, bye-laws, rules and regulations so seriously as being strictly binding on them. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45b) The Petition, he pointed out, contained a great deal of contradictions, misinterpretations and lack of consistency of statements. Newlands pointed out a definite confusion of thought and policy on the part of the Society as regards the status of Head Chiefs under the traditional political constitution. The sole signatory of the Petition, J. E. Casely-Hayford, had himself portrayed the constitutional position and power of the Head Chief in 1903 thus:

At the head of the native state stands pre-eminently the Ohin (King), who is the chief magistrate and chief military leader of the state. He is first in the council of the country and the first executive officer. His influence is only measured by the strength of his character. He it is who represents the state in all its dealings with the outside constitutional bounds, he is supreme in his world, and, so long as he keeps within his own state. (Casely-Hayford 1903: 12)

It was clear from this that the Petition did, in fact, give currency to a conception of traditional customary law which was not in harmony with what the signatory himself once published to the world as the ‘truth presented in the most authentic way’.⁵¹ Again, Casely-Hayford, himself, on 24 February, 1924, intimated his approval of the Provincial Councils in the following:

In Your Excellency’s message reference was made to the protection of Amanhene (Head Chiefs) by what is known as Provincial Councils. Sir, if they are to serve the purpose of enabling the Head Chiefs from among themselves to select and elect some of their number to represent them in the Legislative Council, I say, Sir, it would be an excellent scheme.⁵²

It was probable that Casely-Hayford had in mind the weightier words of John Mensah Sarbah, the greatest exponent of Fante customary laws and national constitution. Sarbah’s opinion was that if the policy of elective representation was introduced ‘the more important rulers should possess the right to elect two or three representatives of their own order as members of the Legislative and Executive Council’ (Sarbah 1968b: 196).

The above quotations sufficiently exposed the lack of consistency of the position of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society on the power vested in the

⁵¹ It was a clear irony that the man who was championing the cause of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society should be entangled in so much contradiction.

⁵² Gold Coast Hansard (1925–1926: 282).

Provincial Councils to elect members to the Legislative Council 'from their ranks only'. This to a greater extent weakened the Society's stand.

The Chiefs lent their full support to the Constitutional proposals. On the issue of representation of the people, Nana Sir Ofori Atta⁵³ indicated that it was rather the Paramount Chiefs who knew their people thoroughly and were acquainted with their true needs. They were thus well placed to bring these to the notice of the Government. The intelligentsia, he pointed out were not so privileged. They did not travel extensively, but were confined to such places on the railway or motorable roads, where the duties of their professions took them. Ofori Atta warned that it would be 'criminal to leave the matter of representation of the people's needs to a class of people who never took pains themselves to ascertain those needs in the people's daily life'.⁵⁴

4. THE ARPS: A HOUSE DIVIDED

The Legislative Council had its first meeting in August, 1926 (Kimble 1963: 449). It was obvious that the Aborigines Rights Protection Society had not only failed to get the Government to consider its Petition; but also its prime object of preventing any African from taking a seat on the Council had failed as well. The success of the new Legislative Council and the growing interest that it generated, dealt a blow to the Society, causing it to split into two factions. Firstly, there were the die-hards who would never back down nor relent on their insistence that the Colonial Government should respect their views on reforms as regards the Provincial Councils and the Legislative Council. They held the view that without this, co-operation with the Government was unthinkable.⁵⁵ Secondly, there was the other group, which conceded that the trend of affairs and the thinking of the times called for at least a change of tactics. They came to believe that only at the centre (that is, in the Legislative Council) was there any chance of influencing Government policy, and possibly, demanding further reforms.⁵⁶ This group also believed that although the constitution and its imports had fallen short of African demands, the new electoral system should be recognised as a first step towards the fuller representation that they were seeking. Again, J. E. Casely-Hayford and others realised that the new Legislative Council and the Provincial Councils had become a *fait accompli* and that there would be no lack of Africans willing to seek election if they themselves did not.⁵⁷ In the light of this, the Aborigines Rights Protection Society policy of boycott was seen as self-injurious. The latter group, described

⁵³ The Omanhene of the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Area, 1912 - 1943.

⁵⁴ Legislative Council Debates (22 February 1926).

⁵⁵ Among this group were people like Kobina Sekyi, G. E. Moore, Omanhen Kojo Mbra III, etc.

⁵⁶ Governor Guggisberg also expressed a similar view (Events 1920-1926; Prospects, 1927-1928).

⁵⁷ The Gold Coast Leader (18 June 1927).

as the progressives, accordingly, rejected the boycott of the Legislative Council.⁵⁸

The split was scheduled to have significant impact on Cape Coast. As already indicated Cape Coast was an important town. It was the nerve centre of the politics of opposition to Colonial Government policies. Furthermore, it was the headquarters or the stronghold of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society; the main political organisation that led organised and sustained opposition against the Colonial Government. From 1897, the Society had strengthened its influence on the town. It had identified itself and worked closely with the traditional political authority. Not only had it gained the confidence and trust of the Chiefs, but had also managed to command respect among a considerable section of the populace.

The incipient polarisation within the Aborigines Rights Protection Society developed into an open split early in 1927. This brought in its wake serious repercussion for that ancient town. The Colonial Government's rejection of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society Petition of 1926 and the split in the Society filled the die-hards at Cape Coast with bitterness and rancour that encouraged the idea that Cape Coast should never be seen to be co-operating with the Colonial Government. However, a wind of change began to sweep the town as the Legislative Council made steady progress. Soon, the views of J. E. Casely-Hayford gained currency and teeming adherents. The Legislative Council had come to stay and was working in spite of the relentless opposition from Cape Coast. Furthermore, the Legislative Council was gradually becoming more and more attractive. It appeared to many to be more reasonable to work for reform of the constitution from within the Council than from without. Yet, the Aborigines Rights Protection Society die-hards whether by reason of philosophy or unmitigated bitterness, refused to reconsider their attitude towards it. The election of municipal Council members of Accra and Sekondi to the Legislative Council were held on separate dates in 1927. J. Glover-Addo and J. E. Casely-Hayford were elected respectively. These events were praised by the Gold Coast Leader in two separate issues as being a typical 'triumph of common sense'.⁵⁹

In Cape Coast, a melodrama in which the 'progressives' were pitted against the 'die-hards' began to unfold.⁶⁰ The Colonial Government, though determined to let the Legislative Council function even in the teeth of opposition, was also concerned with getting a fuller representation by having Cape Coast on it. In November, 1927, Governor Slater met with the Chiefs and people of Cape Coast and attempted to reason with them on the need for them to be represented on the

⁵⁸ This group also included people like J. E. Casely-Hayford, J. Glover-Addo, Kobina Arku Korsah, etc.

⁵⁹ The Gold Coast Leader (3 and 10 September 1927).

⁶⁰ In 1927, H. Van Hien's attempt to offer himself as a candidate for the Cape Coast Municipality was nipped in the bud. Persons willing to endorse his nomination received instructions from the Omanhen and his Council to do otherwise. See PRAAD Adm. (1/622).

Legislative Council so that their views could be heard on important matters.⁶¹ Yet no practical steps were taken by the Cape Coast people to submit an application to the Government, through the Omanhen until July, 1928, when a 'certain section' applied.⁶² That section was the Cape Coast Rate-Payers Association.

The Cape Coast Rate-Payers Association emerged as the mouthpiece of the progressives who identified with the wind of change. They were also seen as the reformists. The Association believed that 'self-injurious conservatism had ruined Cape Coast'; and that the town needed to change with the times.⁶³ They held the view that the development of Cape Coast, as well as any desirable change to the constitution could be done effectively only within the Legislative Council. The Cape Coast Rate-Payers Association sought to explain the clauses of the Royal Order in Council and the Regulations, which appertained to the election of Municipal Members of the Legislative Council (Judgment Book SCT 5/6/3). By so doing it dispelled the abysmal ignorance of many a prospective uneducated voter concerning their legal rights under the provisions of the Order in Council. The Association also worked on the educated who had a mere nodding acquaintance of their rights.

The membership of the Association was considerably wide. It drew a following from prominent members of the town who identified themselves closely with its activities. (Judgment Book SCT 5/6/3) For instance, there were people like Kobina Arku Korsah, Henry Van Hien, Daniel Sackey and William Ward Brew, who was himself, a local Aborigines Rights Protection Society vice-president. The President of this Association was Tufuhen Chief W. Z. Coker, the 'generalissimo' of the seven Asafo companies of Cape Coast and also an ex-officio member of the Oman Council. The selection of Tufuhen Coker for the presidency foreshadowed an important political scenario which was unfolding in Cape Coast at that time; i.e., the educated elite had come to attach a lot of importance to identifying with the traditional political order. Those who were willing to give up their opposition to the new constitution realised that to be effective in Cape Coast they needed the support of the traditional order. This section of the educated, who came to be called the co-operators, realised that they needed legitimisation from the traditional order, like their rivals, and ironically turned to other important 'native order' figures in the town to obtain

⁶¹ The Governor dwelt on two issues which touched a particular nerve in the people of Cape Coast; that was the Water rate and the proposed closing of the local port. See *The Gold Coast* (17 December 1927).

⁶² Judgment Book (SCT 5/6/3). Gocking points out that there was a town meeting at which the towns people swore a collective oath 'to wait until the chiefs decided on what their position should be.' *The Gold Coast Leader* (25 July 1928). He also agrees that there was a great deal of local animosity to the Colonial Government that must have made this opposition seem particularly justified. The Takoradi Harbour and the Central Province Railroad were contemporary issues. See a discussion of this in Chapter One of this thesis. Gocking also adds that there was a very controversial water tax that the government was considering introducing in the main towns of the Colony.

⁶³ *The Gold Coast Leader* (12 September 1928).

this. Hence, they quickly established the Rate-Payers Association and elected Coker as its President.⁶⁴

The situation where the prominent men of town were divided along the lines of reformists and conformists did not augur well for Cape Coast. When W. J. A. Jones became the Commissioner of the Central Province in January, 1928, he and other political officers stationed there also made a special effort to persuade the Cape Coast Municipal voters to elect a member to represent them in the Legislative Council.⁶⁵ The Rate Payers Association sent a deputation led by Van Hien to seek audience with Nana Mbra III and his Councillors including Kobina Sekyi, J. P. Brown, Chief Kwamina Ninfa V, Chief Kweku Arhin, Chief J. H. Dadzie, who refused to forward the application to the Government.⁶⁶

In June, 1928, the Acting Governor, on an official visit to Cape Coast, appealed to the young men to be amenable to the changing times rather than 'commit constitutional suicide'.⁶⁷ After a further meeting with the District Commissioner, the enthusiastic municipal voters concluded that there was no legal obligation on their part to submit their application through the Omanhen or the Oman Council. They were also made to understand that the traditional political authority had no legal right or power to control the actions of the voters with respect to the nomination and election. This was because the political franchise was by law conferred upon the voters of Cape Coast and not the Omanhen or his Council or the Oman.⁶⁸ It also turned out that any person resident in the town could vote, provided he satisfied the requirements of the law. The District Commissioner emphasised that any duly qualified resident of Cape Coast could be nominated or elected to represent the interests of the town in the Legislative Council.⁶⁹ In the end, it became clear that the choice rested with the electorate only, and that customary law did not apply in the matter of nomination or election, which was foreign to African institutions. These observations empowered Tufuhen W. Z. Coker and his group to formally request a proclamation of the election date.⁷⁰ Pursuant to this application, the

⁶⁴ The Gold Coast Leader (8 April 1928). See also Gocking (1981: 293). Gocking also points out that Coker initially opposed the new constitution but his volte face was hardly surprising, since he had invariably opted for cooperation with the government to strengthen his often tenuous position in Cape Coast. Furthermore, Gocking indicates that on this occasion, Coker must have felt doubly assured, since the cooperators seemed to be the strongest group. Most of the prominent barristers in Cape Coast were in favour of electing a municipal member. In general the better-educated members of the community supported cooperation which indicated that they still had most to gain from this position. Giving an instance in case, Gocking pointed out that members of the Cape Coast Literary and Social Club, which was made up of educated young men who considered themselves the upcoming elite in Cape Coast, were in support of the Rate-Payers Association. (Gocking 1981: 294).

⁶⁵ PRAAD Adm. (12/3/59q); Gold Coast Confidential (30 November 1933).

⁶⁶ Informants: Nana Amba Ayiaba, Supi Kobina Minnah, Supi Ebo Minnah.

⁶⁷ The Gold Coast Leader (25 July 1928).

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ The Gold Coast Leader (19 September 1928).

Acting Governor fixed a day and a notification to that effect was gazetted.⁷¹ The Rate Payers Association, with the support of Casely-Hayford, put K. A. Korsah forward as their candidate.

In the eyes of Omanhen Kojo Mbra III and his Councillors, Tufuhen Coker had gone too far in having his own way. He needed to be cut to size and brought to order. The Aborigines Rights Protection Society had been humiliated by the Government's rejection of their 1926 Petition. The Omanhen himself had also got his fair share of the humiliation. This was because his office had been sidestepped in the Cape Coast Municipal Election. Tufuhen Coker's action was seen as a clear case of collaboration with the colonial government. He was summoned to a gathering of the companies at the instance of Omanhen Mbra III on 31 July, 1928 to account for his seeming co-operation with the government.⁷² Realising what was in store for him, Chief Coker refused to attend. The representatives of the Anafo, Ntsin, Nkum, Abrofonkoa, Akrampa and Amanfur Asafo companies present at the meeting passed a resolution deposing him from the office of Tufuhen.⁷³ His refusal to appear was considered an unpardonable breach of trust and blatant violation of oath. George Moore was elected as Tufuhen shortly after the passing of that resolution. This was done, apparently, with the approval of all the companies except Bentsir.⁷⁴ The destoolment heightened tension at Cape Coast.

5. THE ENQUIRY AND RIOT

The Colonial Government lost no time in constituting an enquiry into who was the *bona fide* Tufuhen of Cape Coast. This was because the Bentsir Asafo Company contested Moore's election on the grounds that the office of Tufuhen was an hereditary one, i.e., the occupant must be chosen from among the descendants of Kwamina Edu. G. E. Moore was not one of them. They further contended that they should have been approached by the other companies to suggest a successor to Mr. Coker. The Bentsir Company accused the Omanhen of hiding behind the other companies to depose Coker. They claimed that he was not afforded the benefit of a trial in accordance with customary practice. The other companies rejected these claims and accusations whereupon the Bentsir company rallied to a man in support of Coker. They refused to recognise his deposition or to acknowledge Moore's election.⁷⁵ A bitter quarrel ensued between the contending parties, which came to be known as the Coker Party and the Omanhen Party. Practically every person in Cape Coast became involved on

⁷¹ Gold Coast Gazette (No. 64, 1928).

⁷² Gold Coast Confidential (30 November 1933).

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Interview with Supi Ebo Johnson, Ntsin Asafo Company of Cape Coast, April 1998.

⁷⁵ Gold Coast Confidential (30 November 1933).

one side or the other. Charges and counter charges followed thick and fast, including charges against the Omanhen himself.⁷⁶

In September, 1929, Mr. H. W. Thomas, then Deputy Secretary for Native Affairs, was appointed to hold an enquiry at Cape Coast. He found that the office of Tufuhen was confined to the Kwamina Edu family and that Mr. Coker was properly deposed but rejected Mr. Moore's election as being improper.⁷⁷ The Governor, Sir Ransford Slater, accepted two of Mr. Thomas' findings, but rejected that on Mr. Coker's deposition for reasons connected with Native Customary Law. The Governor's reaction to the findings on the issue was entirely in favour of the Coker party. When this was duly communicated to all concerned the conflict became exacerbated.

It was clear at the outset that government officials stood by Mr. Coker as Tufuhen. For instance, W. J. A. Jones informed the Omanhen that in no circumstance would a permit for the parading of Mr. Moore, in the capacity as Tufuhen, be granted to the companies.⁷⁸ When Mr. Skene became Provincial Commissioner of the Central Province in 1929, he also adopted and maintained the same attitude. This led to strongly worded complaints against the local colonial officers who were accused of bias and partiality. These complaints produced an effect. On 8 July, 1929, Sir Ransford Slater wrote the following minute to the Provincial Commissioner at Cape Coast:

I confess that the impression I get from every paper about Cape Coast Native Affairs that comes before me is that, however annoying it may be to the Provincial Commissioner whom the Omanhen so stubbornly opposed over the election and the Native Administration Ordinance, the Omanhen has a substantial (and as far as I know influential) following at his back; in any case it is very desirable that Government should avoid all semblance of taking sides in Cape Coast political affairs. Mbra III's opponents must work out their own salvation - unless of course he commits any offence against the law, which he certainly hasn't done yet so far as I know. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59q).

The Governor's concern for a show of impartiality in the question of who was the *de jure* Tufuhen of the Oguaa state was based on serious considerations. The 1920s were difficult years for the Gold Coast colonial administration. The government was in the grips of financial stringency as a result of the world slump. This came at a time when pressure was being exerted from London to get the colonies to foot a large share of their financial burden. Given this situation, direct taxation presented itself as a ready means to provide financial relief for the colonial government and the co-operation of chiefs was essential to the plan. (Simensen 1975: 236-244) The Governor as well as the colonial officials in Accra, therefore, wanted absolute neutrality. The grant of a permit to parade Mr.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

Moore anywhere in the town was consistently refused by District and Provincial Commissioners.⁷⁹ Fortunately or unfortunately, on the 3rd of March, 1932, Mr. W. Z. Coker died. Mr. G. E. Moore was, thus, left as the only person with any claims to the position of Tufuhen. Nonetheless, the opposition of the Coker Party made the situation more delicate. They insisted that Coker's demise neither changed nor normalised the election of Moore to the very important office of Tufuhen. To them Coker's death did not mean a transfer or abrogation of what they saw as their right of inheritance.⁸⁰

The tense situation that had been created in Cape Coast by Coker's death never abated but became even more serious. On 20 July, 1932, against the background of mounting tension, the Supi of the Ntsin company applied to the District Commissioner for a permit to enable him hold a ceremony in connection with the installation of company captains. These had been elected within the previous ten or more years. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59p) The Supi attached a programme, which showed the principal feature of the ceremony: public exhibition of the captains of Ntsin company in a procession, led by the Tufuhen, amidst firing of musketry, drumming and singing (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59b). In local parlance, this ceremony was called *Atiran*. It was an activity that cost quite a pretty sum (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59g). Captain Lynch continued the policy of his predecessors in denying a permit to Ntsin Company for the ceremonial procession of captains in which Moore would appear in the capacity of Tufuhen. He kept the Acting Secretary of Native Affairs fully informed of events.⁸¹

The effect of this stalemate was a flurry of correspondence. The infuriated Omanhen occasionally sidestepped the Acting Commissioner of the Central Province to deal directly with the Acting Secretary of Native Affairs and the Acting Colonial Secretary. On the 12th September, 1932, Captain Lynch wrote to the Omanhen to remind him of the findings of the Tufuhen Enquiry. He drew attention particularly to the findings that Mr. Moore was not one of the descendants of Kwamina Edu and was consequently ineligible to succeed to the office of Tufuhen. He pointed out that the procedure adopted for his alleged election and installation breached traditional custom. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59d) Lynch warned that Moore's participation in the intended ceremony would seriously cause offence to a considerable section of the public. The indeterminate nature of the company boundaries, he feared, would also make the situation precarious.

⁷⁹ This refusal was dictated by successive Provincial Commissioners one of whom from October, 1931 to April, 1932, was Mr. C. E. Skene. In April, 1932, Skene went to Accra to act as Secretary for Native Affairs and the charge of the Central Province of which Cape Coast was the headquarters, was entrusted to Captain Lynch, a District Commissioner. He was eight years junior in the service to Mr. Skene.

⁸⁰ Gold Coast Confidential (30 November 1933).

⁸¹ This was all the more necessary because Mr. Skene was to return to the province as Provincial Commissioner when relieved of his duty in the Secretariat. See PRAAD Adm. (12/3/59t).

In a reply to the Commissioner of the Central Province, Omanhen Mbra III sought now to assuage the former's fears and now to rebuke him. He stated that five companies had unanimously agreed to give Ntsin free passage through their quarters. The Omanhen added that the Commissioner of Police, 'the Tufuhen-elect', G. E. Moore, the Supi and Captains of the company had rehearsed their walk along the route to be traversed by the procession. This had been settled to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. The Omanhen had a stern rebuke for the Commissioner:

With the foregoing facts, especially the fact that the five companies, whose quarters will be traversed by the Ntsin Company, have given the latter permission to pass with the Tufuhen G. E. Moore, I cannot imagine the ground for your apprehension. And I should think that if you were dealing impartially in the matter, your duty should be to warn such person or persons who are bent on making mischief and to force him or them to enter into a bond. People who threaten a breach of the peace are those who should be restrained and not those who like the Ntsin Company are peacefully disposed.

If on the face of the facts stated above, you insist upon refusing that Ntsin Company permit, we can only conclude that either certain people are working on your fears or you are encouraging them in their attitude to frustrate the function of the company. I should be glad to have an immediate reply to this letter as the company have undergone considerable expense in their preparation for this ceremony and it would be difficult to cancel the function. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59d)

W. Z. Coker's sister as a representative of the Coker family, and the Supi of the Bentsir Company did not budge in their refusal to recognise Moore and took steps to counter the Omanhen's determination to have Moore recognised as Tufuhen through the *Atiran* ceremony of the Ntsin company. They protested against the parading of Moore in the street of Cape Coast, and warned that if it was not prevented by the Government, there would be a very serious breach of the peace because to acquiesce in the public parade of Moore in the streets in front of a Company of which he was not a member, would be to give tacit recognition to him as Tufuhen. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59c)

The Coker party reiterated that since the government did not recognise Mr. Moore as Tufuhen, it would be unconstitutional for him to go in front of the Ntsin Company. The Supi also warned that it would be an act of great provocation to the Bentsir Company and its allies (that is, Queen Anne's Point or Ekon, Amamima, Apewosika, Kwesi Pra, Kwakusyiabima, etc.) and might spark off a riot (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59f). The complex politics of the Gold Coast made things difficult for the senior colonial officer in the Central Province, who was by then acting as the Secretary of Native Affairs in Accra. Cape Coast under his administration had seen a major disturbance following the Gold Coast riots of 1931. Mr. Skene wanted to prevent yet another disturbing

situation and decided to treat it at his own level. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59h) The dilemma in which he found himself was reflected in two contradictory statements he made to two officers in the Central Province. He told Captain Lynch that he might issue a permit to the Ntsin Company on the clear understanding that Moore took no part in the procession.⁸² Mr. Bewes⁸³ was also informed that a permit might be issued for Ntsin Company to hold their ceremony and to exhibit Moore in an official capacity in their own quarter. This was communicated to Mr. Dawson, the Acting District Commissioner (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59i). Dawson telephoned to Captain Lynch, who was still in Accra, for confirmation. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59h) Lynch replied that he had not been consulted on the matter, but if that was the Acting Secretary of Native Affairs' advice, it should be carried out. When these two instructions got to the factions, the situation did not improve in any way. The impending trouble so cast its shadow in the mounting tension, that there was what could aptly be described as an 'epidemic of agitation' in the town.⁸⁴ In the closing days of September, 1932, lorries brought large reinforcement of police and many more. They were quartered at Elmina, Saltpond and Winneba.⁸⁵ They were put on the alert to proceed to Cape Coast any time owing to the tense situation.

Even though Skene had given instructions for the permit to be issued the Acting District Commissioner still tried to forestall any untoward action. He informed the Supi of Ntsin that the permit would be issued only on condition that the company either confined the performance of that ceremony to their quarter or proceeded with Moore in his unofficial capacity, if they wished to pass through the quarters of Anafo, Nkum, Abrofonkoa, Akrampa and Amanfur Companies. He added that a parade embracing, practically, the whole of the town and involving the display in an official capacity of any person whose position was a matter in dispute posed a threat to peace. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59j) The Omanhen insisted in clear and unambiguous terms that the Tufuhen in the Oguaa Constitution was the officer responsible to him and the Oman for the conduct of the companies. It was, therefore, not their intention to keep him from his proper place in such celebration. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59k) It became clear that any further discussion was futile.

On the 26th of September, the much-delayed permit was issued after the signing of a bond (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59l). This was to the relief of the Omanhen party and much to the chagrin of the Coker party. By the bond, Alfred Donald Dawson, Acting District Commissioner of Cape Coast, gave permission to the Ntsin Company of Cape Coast to exhibit company flags and emblems and fire guns on the occasion of the installation of their new captains (Asafohenfo)

⁸² PRAAD Adm. (12/3/59t). In the afternoon of the 14th of September, Captain Lynch went to Accra for the purpose of attending the Legislative Council. He took with him the original of the Omanhen's letter and saw Mr. Skene regarding it.

⁸³ He was Acting Deputy Provincial Commissioner in the Central Province, stationed at Cape Coast, and in Captain Lynch's absence was the Senior Administrative Officer in the Province.

⁸⁴ Times of West Africa (20 September, 1932).

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

on Friday, the 30th of September, 1932, Saturday, the 1st, Monday, the 3rd, Tuesday, the 4th, Thursday, the 6th, Friday, the 7th and on Saturday, the 8th of October, 1932 (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59m). The procession on 1 October was to follow a prescribed route: Aboom Wells, Kotokoraba Road, Jerusalem Street, Lighthouse Road, Jackson Street via the Bread and Fruit Market to Papratem, Ntsin Street, Ashanti Road, Governor Rowe Road to Kotokuraba and thence to the headquarters of the company (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59m). The route described in the permit was entirely confined to the quarter of the Ntsin Company (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59o). On the 28 September, the Captains of Bentsir came before the District Commissioner and were shown the flags, which the Ntsin Company proposed to exhibit. They were also informed of the route of the procession. Bentsir raised no objection. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59n) The *Atiran*, as already intimated, was a ceremony which involved great expenditure both for the company itself and the elected captains due to be installed. On the part of latter, it was customary for them to make a great provision of alcohol for the rituals and also for the entertainment of the entire company. (Johnson 1933)

On the night of 30th September, the Ntsin Company kept vigil, played drums and sang songs. There was also dancing and much drinking. When the procession started at 9 a.m. thereabouts, on Saturday, 1 October, it did not include Moore. This commenced under the supervision of the police. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59r; 12/3/59j). Moore subsequently joined the procession and the Bentsir Company was notified their captains quickly warned the Colonial Administration and Police that they would have great difficulty in restraining the more turbulent members of their company, if Moore remained at the head of the procession, while it passed down the Jackson Street. This was because although the street was included in the permit, it ran through territories claimed by both companies (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59r). The Coker family was determined to fire at Mr. Moore, if he was found in the procession as it passed down Jerusalem Street. For this cause they enlisted the help of the more turbulent members of the Bentsir Company. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59n) They armed themselves and occupied various vantage points ideal for attacking the procession and at the same time defending their quarters.

In order to avert imminent danger, the Commissioner of Police tried to divert the procession away from Jackson Street through one of the many lanes available for that purpose. With only about seventy policemen, it was impossible for him to get the consent of a mob of young men excited by company customs; and of course as a rule, with 'rum inside them.' Not even the threatened forfeiture of the five hundred pound peace bond could divert the 350 strong swaggering Ntsin Asafo Company young men and their Captains from their intended route and the looming danger. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59n) The Asafo spirit was in full play. Their pride urged them on and they surged forward. Since meekness was neither their style nor mien, they hurled barbed insults at their enemies.

When the procession reached the intersection of the Jackson Street and Lighthouse Hill, where the company boundaries meet, Moore was still at the head (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59n). The presence of certain women in the procession also aggravated the situation. Their taunts, barbed insults and innuendoes sent the point home to the Bentsir Company that the procession was on in spite of their attempts to stop them. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59p) Bentsir could contain it no longer and the first shot went off. This dispersed the procession. The firing became general all around the Bentsir quarter. The intense firing lasted for about thirty minutes and then became sporadic and remained so for about two hours. As persuasive methods were not being too successful in dispersing the combatants, the Commissioner of Police armed some of his men to clear the street of the rioters by force. None of the traditional authorities gave any assistance in suppressing the riot. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59n)

All told, five men lost their lives. Twenty-eight men and women were wounded (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59r). As a result of the widespread use of guns, a search for arms was declared. And for this purpose, a company of the Royal West African Frontier Force was posted at Cape Coast to cordon off areas, which the Police were to comb for arms. A systematic house-to-house search for arms was carried out in each area⁸⁶. A number of arrests and trials followed. About 475 people were placed in custody. Many of them gave themselves up to the Police and admitted taking part in the riot. The Chief Justice arranged for an additional police magistrate to be posted to Cape Coast to assist in the disposal of cases. (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59r) One significant arrest was that of George Moore who was charged with disobeying the conditions set down in the permit granted to Ntsin Company by the District Commissioner (PRAAD Adm. 12/3/59n).

6. CONCLUSION

In the view of the people of Cape Coast, the Colonial Administration was to blame for the outbreak of the fight because of the wavering attitude of its officials. The Bentsir Company for instance did not understand why the officials allowed Moore to be paraded by the Ntsin Company as Tufohen, when the Enquiry indicated that he could not be Tufohen. Omanhen Mbra III was blunt in his reproach. He wondered how 'the unreasonable' and 'biased' attitude in public affairs could enhance co-operation in the administration of the town.

This irritation deepened the anti-government feeling in Cape Coast and was to undermine the relationship between the Colonial Government and the people in the future. Despite attempts by local colonial officials to defuse the tension and to regain the confidence of the traditional authorities, things never got better. This anti-government feeling found expression in the

⁸⁶ That was the Bentsir and Ntsin quarters.

pre-independence political struggle making Cape Coast one of the strongholds of the nationalists in their struggle for independence.

So great was the affront to the credibility and authority of the Colonial Government that the Commissioner of the Central Province was not left off the hook. His lapse in judgement cost him his job. There was also a thorough official reshuffling of the colonial positions in the Central Province. The chequered history of the relations between the Chiefs and people of Cape Coast and the British Colonial Government was marked deeply by mistrust and suspicion thus making action and reaction always equal and opposite.

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- 12/3/59l. Confidential Despatches to Secretary of State. 5 July 1933 to 29 December 1933. Enclosure 3 Schedule of Documents No. 31. Form 3. Bond by ... Application for Permission to Celebrate Native Custom or Exhibit Company Flags or Tribal Emblems. Section 13 (1).
- 12/3/59m. Confidential Despatches to Secretary of State. 5 July 1933 to 29 December 1933. Enclosure 3 Schedule of Documents No. 32. Permission by the District Commissioner to display company drums, emblems, etc. Under Sec. 7.
- 12/3/59n. Confidential Despatches to Secretary of State. 5 July 1933 to 29 December 1933. Enclosure 3 Schedule of Documents No. 33. Letter of Acting Commissioner of the Central Province, Cape Coast, to the Hon. Secretary of Native Affairs, Victoriaborg, Accra. Dated 2 October 1932.
- 12/3/59o. Confidential Despatches to Secretary of State. 5 July 1933 to 29 December 1933. Enclosure 3 Schedule of Documents No. 42. Letter of Lynch and Dawson, District Commissioner and Assistant District Commissioner respectively to the Hon. Commissioner of The Central Province, Cape Coast. Dated 19 November 1932.
- 12/3/59p. Confidential Despatches to Secretary of State. 5 July 1933 to 29 December 1933. Enclosure 3 Schedule of Documents No. 43. Letter of Hon. Commissioner of the Central Province, Cape Coast,

- to the Hon. Colonial Secretary, Victoriaborg, Accra. Dated 19 November 1932.
- 12/3/59q. Minute Paper No. 112.
- 12/3/59r. Letter of G. A. S. Northcote, Acting Governor to Rt. Hon. Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister. Dated 14 October, 1932.
- 12/3/59s. Letter of Acting Secretary of Native Affairs, Victoriaborg, Accra, to Hon. Colonial Secretary. Dated 3 October 1932.
- 12/3/59t. Letter of Thomas to Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister. Dated 10 June, 1933.
- 1/622. Letter of Bleasdel to Hon. Colonial Secretary. Dated 8 August 1927. Enclosed in PRAAD Adm. 12/3/45b.