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**BRITISH COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY  
IN THE GOLD COAST: WHERE THE AHAFO AND  
THE KONKOMBA-BASSARI MEET**

**BY**

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**Introduction**

The indirect rule system of the British colonial administration is one of the subjects that have been widely studied in colonial politics. The principle that lay behind this policy was that every system of Government if it was to be permanent and progressive must have its roots in the framework of indigenous society. In principle, the indirect rule system was to be based on the indigenous system of chieftaincy. But in practice its application varied greatly across regions. In the Gold Coast, colonial administration in the coastal regions which had had a long history of direct contact with Europeans differed from the hinterlands which had been annexed late in the nineteenth century. Within the hinterland itself, there were still variations in the application of indirect rule depending on the indigenous socio-political organisation of the area and the British attitude towards the indigenous states. In spite of the fact that ethnic and cultural differences, as well as British attitude towards local states determined the nature and working of indirect rule, the application of indirect rule across ethnic regions in the Gold Coast has never been compared. This paper examines how indirect rule was applied in both Ashanti and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, using Ahafo and Dagbon as a case study.

### **The Establishment of British Rule in the Gold Coast**

The British arrived in the Gold Coast after the Portuguese and the Dutch in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to trade in gold and slaves. They soon became interested in local politics and began to establish British power over the coastal states. The first British attempt to colonise the Gold Coast was made on March 6, 1844 when Commander Hill got some Fante chiefs to acknowledge the limited power and jurisdiction exercised by Maclean, as the president of the Merchants trading to the Gold Coast. The British position in the Gold Coast was further strengthened with the departure of both the Danes and Dutch in 1850 and 1872 respectively because it left the British, as the only European power controlling the entire coast line of the Gold Coast stretching from Axim in the west to Keta in the east. After 1872 therefore, Asante Empire remained the only potential threat to British power on the Gold Coast. In 1874 a military expedition under Garnet Wolseley defeated the Asante and destroyed Kumasi. With the defeat of Asante, the British felt confident to annex all the southern states and constituted them into a protectorate while converting their forts and settlements on the coast into the British Crown Colony.

The invasion of Asante in 1874 led to the secession of provinces and the tributaries of Asante from the confederacy. In the east, Atebubu and her Brong neighbours, Salaga and Dagomba and in the west Gyaman and Tekyiman took their chance to throw off the Asante yoke. In 1891, Governor Brandford Griffith took advantage of the crisis in Asante Empire and requested the Asantehene to place his territories under British Protection but he declined. By 1894, however, the British administration had become deeply worried about the precarious nature of their position in Asante hinterland. The territories northwest of Asante were slipping into the hands of the French and Samori Toure's Sofas. In 1894 Bonduku had been occupied and Gyaman was threatened by Almani Samori and had to seek French protection. There were also rumours of Asante-Samori alliance against the British schemes in Asante. The Germans were also advancing from the northeast. It was probably to forestall the French and the German advance from the north-west and north east of

Asante hinterland respectively, that the British launched a military campaign against Kumasi in 1896, but the invasion of Asante was certainly to curtail the alliance between two strongest African empires. The failure of Asante to pay the indemnity imposed on them as far back as 1874 was seized upon as an excuse to invade Kumasi. The Asantehene, Agyeman Prempeh I, was taken captive and a resident commissioner stationed in Kumasi and Asante declared British protectorate. The final submission of Asante to the British came only after the Yaa Asantewa rebellion was quelled in 1901.

Northern Ghana on the other hand was acquired through treaties signed with some Northern chiefs through the agency of George Ekem Ferguson. These treaties, signed between 1892 and 1897 were signed between Ferguson and the chiefs of Mamprugu, Dagbon and Gonja and other ethnic groups such as the Dagarti, Sisala and Grunshi. By these treaties, their territories were deemed to have come under the protection of the British government called the Northern Territories. Administratively, the Northern Protectorate was created by an Order in Council passed in 1901. Unlike Asante and the Gold Coast Orders in Council, the Northern Territories provided for 'protection' and not annexation. But the terms of the Foreign Jurisdictions Act allowed for the Northern Territories to be governed as though it had been acquired through conquest. Thus for administrative purposes it was not different from Asante. Lt. Colonel Northcott was therefore appointed the first Chief Commissioner and Commandant of the Northern Territories in 1897. The Konkomba-Bassari were not however part of the Northern Territories when it was acquired in September 1901 by an Order in Council.

The Konkomba-Bassari occupied an area initially declared by the British and the Germans as a Neutral Zone. The Neutral Zone agreement signed in 1888 between Britain and Germany covered the whole of East Gonja and Nanumba territories up to the Oti River stretching northwards just outside Sansane Mango. By this agreement, these territories were to remain open to commercial activities of Britain and Germany. Per this demarcation, the whole of Konkomba-Bassari areas fell within the Neutral Zone. But the French

threat of taking over these territories forced the British and the Germans to throw the Neutral Zone agreement overboard. In 1896, an expeditionary force under Dr. Grunner was sent by the Germans to conquer Northern Ghana including the Konkomba-Bassari areas. By 1901 therefore the Nanumba, a substantial portion of Dagbon and Mamprugu as well as all the Konkomba and the Bassari had come under German rule. The Konkomba-Bassari areas in Northern Ghana only came under the British administration after 1914 when Germany was ousted by the Allied Powers in the First World War and ruled as a British Mandate area until 1956 when it joined the Gold Coast after the plebiscite of the same year.

### **The British Administrative Policy in Asante and the Northern Territories**

The general view of historians seems to be that the British had no consistent policy towards Asante. But it is now clear from the works of Adu-Boahen that the British policy in Asante was guided by the principle of disintegration and fragmentation of Asante Confederacy. From 1874 when the British first invaded Kumasi to about 1888, the British seem to have adopted a policy of non-interference in the Asante internal affairs. Even though the missionaries and British traders in the Gold Coast were urging the colonial administration that the time was ripe for Asante to be brought under the colonial framework of the Gold Coast, the home government was not prepared to engage in the expensive venture of bringing Asante under British rule. But when Prempeh became the Asantehene in 1888, he was so successful in reconsolidating Asante power that the colonial government became alarmed about the security of their colony in Southern Ghana. By the 1890s, the British appeared to have changed their policy of non-intervention in the Asante internal affairs to that of interference. They first persuaded Prempeh to voluntarily accept British protection but he turned down the offer. Adu Boahen argues that it was the achievements and activities of Prempeh in a very short space of time that posed a serious threat to the British design in the Gold Coast and led to the British

invasion of Kumasi and exile of Prempeh in 1896. The general view of the British was that 'the continued existence of a savage and barbarous power like Ashanti represented a constant menace to the Gold Coast colony'. The underlining British policy in Asante was therefore 'breaking up of Ashanti into two or more tribes who would be independent of each other', thereby preventing Kumasi from establishing itself in its former power'. In pursuit of this ends, the British proceeded to dismember the Empire by signing separate treaties with the chiefs of the various tributary and confederate states. They also began to offer military assistance to Asante former vassals who showed interest in breaking away from Asante. The colonial administration in Asante was therefore British fervent desire to prevent the revival of Asante Empire and keep Asante politically divided and economically weak. During the early period of the colonial rule therefore, any political arrangement in Asante which would bring the former vassals of Asante close to Kumasi was gravely resented.

The British policy in the Northern Territories on the other hand was based on incorporation. Throughout the colonial period, the official policy of the British colonial administration in the Northern Territories was to incorporate the so called acephalous groups and the smaller states into the bigger ones. The British policy as clearly spelt out by Guggisberg was to maintain 'any paramount Chiefs that exist and gradually absorb under these any small communities scattered about'. The aim was to see that, 'someday the Dagombas, Gonjas and Mamprusi should become strong native states'. Immediately the British acquired their sphere of influence over the former German colony, they preceded to rule the Konkomba and the Bassari populations through the Dagomba chiefs. From 1931 constitutional conferences were held throughout the Northern Territories to form traditional states with elaborate constitutions. The result of this was that the Nchumuru and Naweri were placed under the authority of the Gonja divisional chief of Kpembi. The Kusasi, Grushi, Talensi, Bimoba and some Konkomba were also put together under the Nayiri. The majority of the Konkomba and the Bassari

were also put under the Ya Na. In 1932 three ordinances, Native Authority, Native Treasuries and Native Tribunal, were passed giving legal backing to indirect rule and the arrangement put in place by the British officials in the Konkomba-Bassari areas. After 1932, the Konkomba and the Bassari were practically and legally incorporated under Dagbon state and were ruled as part of it.

### **The British Colonial Administrative Arrangement in Ahafo**

The people referred to as Ahafo inhabit the Asunafo, Asutifi, and Tano districts of the Brong Ahafo Region and Ahafo-Ano North and South in Ashanti Region. In the pre-colonial period the land on which the Ahafo occupied was conquered and annexed by the Asante from the Aowin in 1722. Subsequent to that, the Asante wing chiefs systematically settled their subjects in the areas resulting in the establishment of twenty eight colonies. Each Ahafo *odikro* (headman) served the Asantehene through their various overlords. In 1896 when Prempeh was arrested and exiled by the British, the British signed a series of treaties with Ahafo chiefs making them independent of Asante. For instance, in May 1896, the British signed a treaty of Friendship and Protection with twelve Ahafo chiefs. The treaty made Ahafo a British protectorate and also offered it a freedom charter that guaranteed its independence from Asante. From 1896 onwards Ahafo ceased to be an Asante dependency and became a British protectorate and it was organised into a distinct division known as Asunafo-Ahafo. The freedom charter made provisions for the creation of three subdivisions within the Asunafo-Ahafo division. These were Kukuom division, the *Nifa* division and the *Benkum* division. Kukuom which was on equal footing with Mim and Noberkaw was elevated to a paramount status by the British and the other divisions subordinated to it. Mim and Noberkaw were also promoted to divisional status with the rest of Ahafo communities subordinated under them. The independent Asunafo-Ahafo division was under the jurisdiction of the District Commissioner of Sefwi but after 1900, it was separated from Sefwi and included in the North-Western District of Ashanti. Finally, as a result of the constant tension

and conflicts between the paramount chief and Beditor, the chief of Mim, the colonial authorities stationed a permanent official in Goaso to administer the Ahafo district.

As a matter of fact, the Ahafo chiefs were not enthused with this artificial arrangement. The chief of Mim, Beditor and his people resented their subordination to Kukuomhene who became the paramount chief of the division. The other village headmen were also hesitant to serve the divisional chiefs put over them. There was therefore confusion and tension among the various chiefs in Ahafo. From 1896 to 1915, when Beditor was imprisoned and banished from Ahafo by the colonial government, he remained a thorn in the flesh of the Kukuomhene. In the same way, Kenyasi I and Ntotroso were not prepared to serve Mim as stipulated in the traditional constitution. Due to the constant tensions and conflicts between the Kukuomhene and Beditor, AsunafoAhafo paramountcy as an independent division was finally abolished and Ahafo reverted to its pre-1896 arrangement under Kumasi. It was anticipated by the majority of the Ahafo chiefs that this restoration would end their perceived maltreatment and extortion by the Kumasi chiefs. But Ahafo's situation was the case of 'going from frying pan to fire'. Under Kumasi, the various Kumasi overlords subjected Ahafo to severe exploitation, extortion and suppression. Although, some Ahafo chiefs resented this new arrangement in which Ahafo was returned to Kumasi overlordship, it was convenient for the British to put the Ahafo, who were considered unable to govern themselves, under Kumasi because Asante no longer posed a threat to British power by 1932. In spite of the exploitation and the disadvantage that this latter arrangement brought to Ahafo, it remained under Kumasi until independence.

### **The British Colonial Administrative Arrangement in the Konkomba-Bassari area**

As we have already pointed out, the Konkomba and the Bassari of the Northern Territories came under British rule after 1914 when German Togo was partitioned between the British and the French after the First World War. In the Konkomba area the partition

followed, in most parts, the course of the Oti River and those Konkomba on the west side of the river fell under the British sphere whilst those on the east came under the French. The Bassari were also partitioned between the French and the British. It was believed that the Konkomba and the Bassari had no chiefs of their own and that the only hope of a political organization amongst them was to put them under 'strong Dagomba chiefs'. Consequently, the Konkomba and the Bassari came within the newly created Eastern Dagomba district with the Ya Na as the head chief. The Konkomba and the Bassari were divided among the Dagomba divisional chiefs of Demon, Zabzugu, Gushiegu and Sunson. All Konkomba and Bassari villages were responsible to the Ya Na through their various Dagomba divisional or sub-divisional chiefs. This arrangement was strange for the Konkomba and the Bassari because they had never at any point in their history come under Dagomba rule. During the German administration, the Konkomba were administered as an independent entity and the German district commissioners interacted directly with the Konkomba villages and passed orders through the German appointed Konkomba chiefs. The British arrangement was therefore resented by the Konkomba and the Bassari.

The Konkomba resisted this subordination under the Dagomba chiefs in many ways including violent rebellions. The Konkomba and Bassari also adopted large scale emigration as a reaction to this arrangement in Dagbon. But the colonial government refused to entertain an alternative to Dagomba authority for the Konkomba-Bassari administration. In 1932 indirect rule was formally introduced with the establishment of Native Tribunals and Native Treasuries, which further entrenched Konkomba-Bassari subordination under the Dagomba rule. Under the Native Tribunals, the Dagomba chiefs were given authority to adjudicate Konkomba marital disputes according to 'native law'. Under the arrangement, native law meant Dagomba customary law. The Native Treasuries also gave the Dagomba chiefs the power to collect taxes in Konkomba and Bassari villages and this was extended to include payment of tributes and other services for the maintenance and upkeep of the Dagomba

chiefs.

These powers were often abused by the Dagomba chiefs and the Konkomba came to be exploited and extorted by their Dagomba overlords. Although the Land and Native Rights Ordinance of 1927 vested the control and administration of the Northern Territories lands in the Governor, all disputes over land were settled in accordance with native law. Through the Native Court, the Ya Na came to control land in the district to the detriment of the Konkomba and the Bassari. This arrangement was not only applied in Dagbon but also Mamprusi and Gonja. Without political representation in the Native Authority and lack of control over land, the Konkomba effectively lost their status as an independent ethnic group with a distinct culture and tradition. The Konkomba therefore became a subject people under the Dagomba and after independence this arrangement continued and sowed the seed for the explosive ethnic conflicts in Northern Ghana in the 1990s.

#### **The British Administrative Policy in Ahafo and the Konkomba-Bassari Areas Compared**

Whilst the initial policy of the British in Asante was guided by the policy of disintegration and fragmentation of the Asante Empire, the guiding principle in the Northern Territories was the policy of incorporation and building bigger native states. The British arrangement in Ahafo was therefore guided by the British policy of fragmentation and disintegration of Asante. It was for the purpose of keeping Ahafo permanently severed from Asante that Governor Maxwell placed the newly created Asunafo-Ahafo Division under the jurisdiction of the District Commissioner of Sefwi. This was to consolidate the independence of the new division and avoid the interference of the former Kumasi landlords in the internal affairs of Ahafo. This was further echoed when Armitage proposed that Bidetor should be allowed to leave Ahafo and served the Dormaaahene since he preferred to serve Dormaa rather than Kukuom. Steward flatly rejected the proposal because according to

him, 'it might have the unfortunate effect of throwing the other half of the Ahafo back into the hands of the Kumasi chief'. The objective of keeping Asante disintegrated and divided necessitated the setting up of Ahafo as an independent division. Clearly in Ahafo there was conscious efforts on the part of the British to keep Ahafo severed from Asante and avoid the revival of the Asante Empire which was a thorn in the flesh of the British colonisers.

Unlike in Asante, the British supported the building of large states in the Northern Territories and therefore sanctioned the arrangement in which the Konkomba and the Bassari were forcefully put under the authority of the Dagomba chiefs. The pursuit of their grand scheme in the Northern territories could not allow the British to see any alternative to the incorporation of the Konkomba and the Bassari under the Dagomba chiefs. Even when the arrangement was not working the colonial officials refused to allow self rule in the Konkomba-Bassari areas. The different objectives of the British in Asante and the Northern Territories therefore determined the respective political arrangements in Ahafo and Dagbon.

Some earlier writers seem to suggest that the bizarre political arrangement through which Ahafo paid allegiance to Asante might have caused the British to organise Ahafo as an independent division. According to Tordoff the setting up of Ahafo as an independent division was 'due to the necessity for providing some form of administration in an area comprising a number of villages each owing allegiance to one or another of the Kumasi clan chiefs.' The question of impracticability of the system in vogue in Ahafo should be disregarded because the pre -1896 constitutional arrangements by which Ahafo paid allegiance to the various Asante chiefs was not different from what the British instituted in Dagbon between the Konkomba and the Dagomba chiefs. Just like in the Konkomba-Bassari areas where the British placed each Konkomba headman under a Dagomba divisional chief, each Ahafo village or settlement came under a division of Asante and paid allegiance to the Asantehene through the Fekutire (Head of division). Clearly, if the British could organise the Konkomba under various divisional chiefs

of the Dagomba, there was no reason why they should not sanction the pre-1896 political arrangement between Ahafo and Asante. The only reason why the British refused to sanction the situation in Ahafo was the obvious fact that they wanted to keep Ahafo separated and far apart from Kumasi to avoid the revival of the Asante Empire.

Although the British claimed that their policy of indirect rule was based on the indigenous political arrangement of the territories, the British administrative policy in both Ahafo and the Konkomba-Bassari areas was far from being guided by indigenous political arrangement. In both areas there was a clear case of administrative convenience to the neglect of the indigenous political arrangement of the areas. In the first place, the recognition of Ahafo as an independent division was not based on the indigenous system in Ahafo. Ahafo, as we have already pointed out, had been conquered and ruled by Asante since 1722. Secondly, the elevation of Kukuomhene over the other divisional chiefs was not also sanctioned by tradition. This was why Beditor refused to come under Kukuomhene because he thought of 'himself as big man as the king [Kukuomhene]'. Similarly, the subordination of the Konkomba and the Bassari under the Dagomba chiefs was for convenience and did not rest on the indigenous political arrangement of the areas. The majority of the Konkomba and the Bassari had never been under Dagomba rule. In Dagbon the British based their political arrangement in which the Konkomba and the Bassaris were subordinated under Dagomba chiefs on the Dagomba claims that they had conquered and ruled over the Konkomba in the pre-colonial times. Although it was soon realized that there was no evidence for such a claim, the British continued to base their colonial policy towards the Konkomba and the Bassari on this false premise because it suited their objective of building strong native states around historically centralized polities. Clearly on the evidence of the British activities in both Ahafo and the Konkomba-Bassari areas, the British endorsed traditional arrangements when it suited their imperialist designs but disregarded obvious traditional arrangements when they were incompatible with their agenda.

The British seem to have applied the same strategies in the enforcement of their policies in both Ahafo and Konkomba-Bassari areas. The British used imprisonments, threats and intimidation to enforce their artificial arrangement in Ahafo. For instance the chiefs of Kenyasi I and Ntotoso were averse to serving Mimhene as stipulated in the traditional constitution. But through intimidation and threats, the British were able to subject these chiefs under Mim. Beditor was also forcefully subjected to Kukuom overlordship through threats, imprisonment and banishment. In The Konkomba-Bassari areas the British administration also employed fines and burning of villages to force the Konkomba and Bassari headmen to accept the artificial arrangement imposed on them. For instance, in 1919 the District Commissioner imposed a fine of 10/- each upon the headmen of Chagbaan and Kutuli for not supplying carriers when ordered to do so by the chief of Demon. The headmen of Samboli and Kucha were also fined for failing to supply workers demanded by the Demon chief. In 1940 several Konkomba villages were destroyed by a British punitive expedition against the Konkomba for rebelling against the Zagbeli Na.

The administrative arrangement adopted by the British in both Ahafo and the Konkomba-Bassari areas brought about similar reactions and led to comparable outcomes. Just as the Ahafo chiefs found their subordination under Kukuomhene irksome, so did the Konkomba and Bassari find their subordination under Dagomba chiefs. Much like Beditor, the Konkomba headmen refused to take instruction and directive from their Dagomba divisional chiefs. The chief of Sunson for example was reported to have exercise no authority over his Konkomba villages and 'dare not visit these villages.' The District Commissioner noted in his diary that the Konkomba entirely disregarded summonses by the Demon-Na and try to shoot his messengers. In another instance the Demon Na complained that a Konkomba who had refused to attend his court on the fourth summons, threatened his messenger 'to show him something'. The resistance encountered by the British policy in both Ahafo and the Konkomba-Bassari areas brought the British more

deeply into the day-to-day lives of both the Ahafo and the Konkomba and the Bassari and allowed them to begin to deal directly with the British officials. For instance, in Ahafo, the trouble caused by the rebellious activities of Beditor forced the British to station a government official at Goaso to deal promptly with the incidents. A. W. Cardinal, therefore, became the first Acting District Commissioner of Ahafo. In the case of the Konkomba-Bassari areas, a police post was established in Saboba to patrol Konkomba and Bassari areas to ensure obedience to their Dagomba overloads and in January 1946 James Anderson was appointed the first Assistant District Commissioner in Saboba with the instruction to establish a Konkomba administration.

Upon a close examination, it became evident to British officials that their model of political arrangement and indirect rule in Ahafo had failed. The frequent conflicts and disputes among the Ahafo chiefs made the colonial administration 'to regard the Ahafo people as being incapable of governing themselves'. The British soon realised that their model of political arrangement in Ahafo had failed. In 1932, the British recognised the impracticability of their arrangement in Ahafo and reverted to the pre-1896 Ahafo allegiance to Kumasi. By 1932, the fear of the revival of the Asante Empire had disappeared and therefore the subordination of Ahafo under Kumasi no longer posed a threat to the British power in the Gold Coast.

Similarly, the British officials recognised the impracticability of their political arrangement in the Konkomba-Bassari area. As early as 1919 some British officials began to point out that what had been done in the Konkomba areas was not 'in keeping with British policy' and suggested that Konkomba should be self governed. It was proposed that a visit be made to the Konkomba country to arrange 'an election of a paramount Chief and Sub Chiefs of villages in that sphere of Konkomba influence now under British Rule, as Savelugu before the War was made Head Chief of British Dagomba.' In 1932, another colonial official bemoaned the lack of justification for the political arrangement in which the Konkomba were subordinated to the Dagomba chiefs and pointed out that the Konkomba were

unwilling 'to submit to such nebulous authority as the Dagomba chiefs exercised'. Consequently the Konkomba-Bassari areas were regarded by the administration as 'a festering sore in an otherwise healthy administration'. But unlike Ahafo where the British agreed to change the political arrangement, the colonial administration entertained no alternative to Dagomba authority. There is an obvious explanation for the British apparent flexibility in Ahafo. In 1932, the Asante Empire had been weakened to the extent that it no longer posed a threat to the British power and therefore their policy of disintegration of the Asante Empire had been abandoned. In the case of the Konkomba the 1930s was the period of native state building by the colonial government in the Northern Territories. There was therefore no way the British would acquiesce to Konkomba self rule. The Konkomba and the Bassari were subjected to exploitation and extortion by their Dagomba overlords. The Konkomba headmen were disrespected by their Dagomba overlords and were required to pay tributes to the Dagomba chiefs. During harvests, they were obliged to fill the barns of the Dagomba chiefs with grains and with the aid of the Native Authority Police (*Nana kana*), the chiefs' representatives moved round the various communities and returned with bundles of tubers of yam and livestock. It was mandatory for the Konkomba and the Bassari to give to the Dagomba chief a hind leg of a cow slaughtered during funerals. The extortion of Konkomba and the Bassari through these methods became so rampant in Zabzugu division the Zabzugu chief, Abdulai, gained the accolade *maabalim* (the insatiable one) among the Bassari. Although by the Native Authority law the Dagomba chiefs had the right to collect taxes and some of which was to be used for the upkeep of chiefs' family, the manner in which these were collected amounted to extortion. Some of these extortions have been reported by Tait as follows:

From time to time collectors were sent into Konkomba-Bassari areas to collect food stuff which was sold in the market to raise money. When the Ya Na was fined in the District Commissioner's court in 1950, no fewer than

two lorry loads of sorghum were collected in the Saboba region alone on the grounds that, 'The European says it has got to be paid'. In the same year some Konkomba were stopped by Dagomba on their way into Yendi market and their head loads of new yams taken, on the ground that they had paid no tribute to the Ya Na... Of these particular yams one head load went to the District Commissioner's interpreter, one to the sergeant of police in Yendi, and the rest to the Ya Na's household. The total value was about 18 pounds. It is rare for a Konkomba to appeal to the District commissioner though instances of this sort of extortion are frequent.

These extortions became so unbearable in the 1930s and 40s that the Konkomba rebelled against and killed the Zagbeli chief who had long extorted them. The result of the Konkomba rebellion was mass imprisonments and destruction of Konkomba homes and farms.

Unfortunately for Ahafo the change of the political arrangement did not liberate them, but rather increased their suppression and exploitation. Under Kumasi, the Ahafo were subjected to similar treatment as the Konkomba and the Bassari under the Dagomba. Like the Konkomba and the Bassari, the Ahafo were subjected to a dehumanising treatment which Kwarteng describes as 'humiliating, exploitative, extortionate and intimidating.' With the exception of the Odikro of Sankore, who received humane treatment from his Kumasi overlord, the rest of Ahafo chiefs were victimised and disrespected by the Kumasi overlords. They also exploited the resources of Ahafo to enrich themselves to the neglect of the development of Ahafo communities. Immediately following the restoration of the confederacy, the Kumasi chiefs re-asserted their ownership of Ahafo lands and began

to exploit Ahafo.

By custom, Kumasi chiefs were entitled to some percentage of royalties, tributes and ground rents and forest resources gratuities from Ahafo as landlords but the way these were collected amounted to extortion. The exploitation of the Ahafo by the Kumasi chiefs reached its peak in late 1938, when both the Hiahene and the Akwaboahene requested the District Commissioner in Kumasi to permit them to inspect Ahafo farms and to conclude official agreements with the Adikrofo on the payment of tributes. However, both the Assistant District Commissioner of Goaso and the District Commissioner of Kumasi objected to such a move, but agreed in principle to payment of tribute by the Ahafo Adikrofo to the Asante chiefs. To streamline the payment of tributes, the District Commissioner recommended to the Chief Commissioner of Asante, to devise a scheme for the sharing of tributes that would be acceptable to all the stakeholders of Ahafo. In November 11, 1939 an agreement was reached between Asantehene and Ahafo chiefs on how to share the tributes. From then on:

the Kumasi chiefs alienated large portions of the Ahafo virgin forest to land speculators who established cocoa and oil-palm plantations. They also leased forest reserves to timber concessionaires to establish timber firms. These agreements earned the Kumasi Chiefs thousands of pounds which they used to construct large multi-storey buildings in Kumasi.

Ahafo chiefs were gravely dissatisfied with this agreement but with the tacit approval of the British administration they dare not challenge it.

Although both the Ahafo and the Konkomba and the Bassari were unjustly treated under their overlords, the Ahafo was better incorporated into Asante than their Konkomba-Bassari counterparts. Despite the ill treatment Ahafo received from their Kumasi overlords, Ahafo were allowed representation on the Kumasi State Council and on the Asante Confederacy Council. The Odikro of Mim, Kwaku Appiah, was made the Ahafo spokesman and representative on these

councils. Although some Ahafo, particularly those who had Denkyira background, were dissatisfied with this arrangement, this channel of participation in Kumasi at least satisfied a section of the Ahafo chiefs and reduced the tension between Ahafo and Kumasi. But in Dagbon, the Konkomba were denied representation in the Dagbon State Council. The Konkomba and the Bassari were deemed to have been adequately represented by the Dagomba divisional chiefs under whose jurisdiction they lived. In 1957, the Konkomba complained that the Dagomba divisional chiefs could not adequately represent them because 'there are many traditions and customary rites of our people such as marriage, funerals and others, which are not known by the Dagomba headmen'. The Bassari also protested their absence at the Dagbon State Council and in 1961 a Bassari representation was admitted on the Dagomba Traditional Council but the Konkomba continued to be denied representation in the Dagomba State Council until the 1990s. The lack of Konkomba and Bassari representation in the Dagomba traditional council led to the serious tension between these groups of people and finally exploded into an open conflict in 1994.

The British policy in Ahafo and Konkomba areas left behind similar legacies for both the Ahafo and the Konkomba and the Bassari. Although the British claimed that they adopted indirect rule in order to preserve the indigenous cultures of the colonies, the policy in Ahafo and the Konkomba areas created power structures which were not sanctioned by the tradition and culture of the people. The creation of political grouping by forcing the amalgamation of groups that had previously been independent or dividing groups which had previously been a single unit, the British brought about the sub-nationalist consciousness witnessed in Ahafo and the Konkomba-Bassari areas in the post colonial period. The British artificial arrangements where some groups or chiefs were subordinated under others created the lasting impression of inferiority and superiority of some groups. In the Northern Ghana, the Konkomba and the Bassari lost their rights to land since land and resources were firmly put in the hands of the Dagomba. In Ahafo some chiefs now lay claims to land

which were put under them by the British. The British colonial policy is therefore the source of deprivation and marginalization of some groups in Asante and Northern Ghana.

### Conclusion

The British application of indirect rule in Ahafo and Konkomba-Bassari areas reveals interesting parallels and differences. The chief consideration of the British administrators was administrative convenience regardless of the repercussions their policy would have on the receiving societies. In both Ahafo and Konkomba-Bassari areas the British disregarded the indigenous political arrangements and created artificial power structures to suit their objectives. It soon became clear to the British that their administrative arrangements were not acceptable to the people they ruled. In Ahafo, they reverted to the precolonial political arrangement in which Ahafo paid allegiance to Kumasi, but they refused to change the administrative arrangement in the Konkomba-Bassari areas. The colonial structuring and manoeuvring of the ethnic groups for purposes of achieving their objectives created a lasting impression of ethnic superiority within those who benefited from the British legitimisation of their authority, and inferiority of those subordinated to them. It is this legacy of the British colonial administration that is responsible for the intractable chieftaincy, ethnic and land conflicts in both Ahafo in the Brong Ahafo Region and eastern Dagbon in the Northern Region of Ghana.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>50</sup> Interview with Niina Tindow, 77 years, Utindaa, Kuyuli Clan, Tatale, 6 January, 2012; Bedumbe Lalibe, 64 years, Regent, Kandin Chiefship, Kandin, 14<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2012; Yabambe Shei, 106 years, Utindaan, Shieni Clan, Shieni, 14 January, 2012.
- <sup>51</sup> Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 9.
- <sup>52</sup> On this occasion the chiefs took advantage of the veterinary office to extort cattle from Konkomba cattle owners. But after paying the required number of cattle charged for failing to bring their cattle for inoculation, the chief attempted to fine the Konkomba for the same offence. This led to a raid of the Zagbeli village and all its inhabitants including the chief were killed and their village totally destroyed
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