‘UNDESIRABLE PRACTICES’: WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND THE POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN GHANA, 1930-1972

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of History
In conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
April, 2014

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In memory of my father,

Joseph Augustin Cammaert

1939-2013

Always
Abstract

Following the First World War, colonial policy in West Africa underwent a transition as British administrators began to adopt indirect rule reforms to help usher in peasant-driven agricultural development in Northern Ghana. This thesis addresses the impact of these important policy changes on women and children through a study of local colonial and indigenous responses to four bodily practices: female circumcision, human trafficking (female pawning and illicit adoption), nudity and prostitution. Although much has been written about colonial and post-independence legislation of the female body, especially the female circumcision controversy in Kenya and prostitution in the mines and cities of east and southern Africa, few historical studies have fully considered the role of West African development doctrine, or the importance of ‘tradition’ and ‘community’, in colonial policies affecting women and children in Northern Ghana.

Through a Parliamentary inquiry in 1930, West African departments came to reluctantly engage with questions of women and children’s status. Collectively, they decided that a gradualist path which sought to preserve community or ‘tribal’ cohesion was preferable to legislation promoting individual rights and civil society. This thesis situates this reluctance to introduce potentially destabilizing legislation in the context of development doctrine in northern Ghana.

This thesis focusses on the north-eastern borderland corridor of northern Ghana where in the 1930s anthropologists and district officials investigated questions of female circumcision and as a solution to Parliamentary inquiry, sought to encourage a milder form practiced in infancy, rather than adolescence. The refusal to legislate reflected West African officials’ privileging of ‘community’ over the ‘individual’ and was repeated in their responses to ‘undesirable practices’, including nudity, pawning, and in post-independence times, illicit adoption and prostitution. In exploring state officials’ handling of these practices in a gradualist manner, this thesis illuminates the connections between development doctrine and the role of the male colonial gaze in managing undesirable practices in north-eastern Ghana, West Africa.
Acknowledgements

We are living at a time in which public opinion has turned against the pursuit of higher education in the humanities and many question the value and significance of a PhD in history. For me, the significance cannot be measured by employment prospects or financial gains: this doctorate is an education which my father could not have dreamt of when immigrating to Canada. It was simply not an option. This thesis is as much due to the labours of my parents – on the farm and in the factory and hospital – as it is my desire to move forward, make them proud, and contribute some meaningful way to society.

This thesis was made possible by the intellectual contributions and support of numerous individuals, first and foremost being that of my supervisor, Robert Shenton. I am grateful to be included in the long list of students who have benefited from Bob’s intellectual direction and personal kindness. He took a chance by agreeing in 2008 to supervise my doctoral studies. I am genuinely grateful for this opportunity as well as the guidance, patience, and consistent support he has provided over the years. In particular, I am thankful for the freedom provided to make this thesis my own and the patience shown as my ideas slowly percolated and evolved over time. This thesis is but my first serious attempt to understand and apply Mike Cowen and Bob Shenton’s thoughts on development in Africa; any faults in this endeavor are wholly mine.

Research for this project was made possible by funding from a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Fellowship (2010-2012); Ontario Graduate Scholarship (2009-2010); Timothy C. Franks Travel Grant, Huntley MacDonald Sinclair Travelling Scholarship, and Graduate Dean’s Doctoral Field Travel Grant; as well as numerous Teaching Fellowships and Assistantships at Queen’s University. I am indebted to Janice Boddy, whose reading course and specialist guidance made this project possible, and those individuals in the Queen’s history department who have supported me since my first days as a graduate student: Sandra den Otter, Ishita Pande, Adnan Husain, Ariel Salzmann, and Amitava Chowdhury. Heartfelt thanks to Yvonne Place – the heart of the department – whose personal and administrative support has guided me through difficult times.
I am grateful to those individuals and organizations in Ghana which facilitated my research and contributed to the intellectual and political contours of this thesis: Kojo Amanor, for his intellectual guidance while Good Family Fellow and for the kindness he demonstrated at the Institute for African Studies, University of Ghana; Sheena Cameron, for her friendship and assistance in navigating Northern Ghana and Accra; Ato Quayson for providing me a research assistantship while in Accra in 2010 and Samuel Ntewusu, for helping me navigate the archives in Tamale and Balme Library at the University of Ghana; Kate Skinner for her research advice; staff at the Tamale and Accra branches of the Ghana National Archives; World University Services Ghana for providing me my first placement in Yendi (2008) which opened my eyes to the local economy of NGO work; Chief Moses Abaare Appiah in Binaba, Vivian Abemim in Binaba, and Madame Margaret Mary Issaka in Bolgatanga, for their interviews and informal discussions; staff at The Institute for Cross Cultural Studies, Catholic Guesthouse, and Sandgardens for providing me sustenance and a solitary space to think, write, and recover from illness while in Northern Ghana. Thanks also to Shirley Ferguson for her friendship over the years. My warmest thanks are reserved for the ladies of the Bawku East Women’s Development Association. In particular, I would like to thank Lawrencia Azure and Elizabeth Apibil for their assistance in translating oral interviews and for Lawrencia’s follow-up email in 2013 which did much to bolster my spirits while writing the final draft.

In the United Kingdom, I would like to thank Hilary Sapire for her guidance and supervision during my time as a Visiting Student Researcher at Birkbeck College; John Parker and the folks at the SOAS African History seminar for providing such a congenial environment in which to learn; and staff at the National Archives, Wellcome Archives, and British Library. Special thanks for the staff at the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies for their assistance. In France, warm thanks to the staff at the Centre for Overseas Archives in Aix-en Provence for their patience.

Chapters of this thesis were presented at various conferences and workshops at home and abroad. I am indebted to the kind individuals who provided feedback at the Queen’s Working Paper Series and the annual Canadian Association of African Studies.
conferences. Special thanks to Anne Hugon for the opportunity to present at my first ‘big’ conference – Women and Gender in Colonial Contexts in 2012.

There are few instances where a student is fortunate to have an excellent supervisor as well as a challenging and genuinely supportive cohort. I am grateful to four colleagues in particular who have provided the sober feedback that is born only through years of sharing offices and apartments, family celebrations and emergencies, late-night debates at the pub and across time zones, and long-haul (at times questionable) international and domestic flights to the UK, Turkey, and India. Warmest gratitude to Reeju Ray, for her personal warmth and incisive thoughts on colonialism and post-colonial interventions; Scott de Groot, for his sense of humour and for pushing me to think seriously about the interplay between sexuality and political economy in this thesis; Erin Mandzak, for her unconditional support and for reminding me of political life outside of the thesis; and Braden Hutchinson, for his sarcastic banter and critical assistance in editing chapter by chapter as well as the final draft. My intellectual development in this program has been a collective effort for which I am eternally grateful.

My lifelong friendships with my mother, Vera, as well as Lara, Amanda, Quinn, Jessica and Janet have provided me a modicum of balance during this PhD. I am indebted to these friends for keeping me grounded and ensuring I did not completely lose myself in my work. Special thanks to Rahul (Mike) for entering my life at a most difficult time and providing genuine and consistent support for me, my family, and my intellectual ambitions.

It is difficult to find the words to thank my father and mother, both of whom have been so supportive and self-sacrificing. Often, parents instill their children with a love of learning, only to guide them into a direction of their own choice. I was fortunate enough to receive the unconditional and unquestioning support of my parents to pursue my studies in history. At times, I felt ridiculous navigating the world of academia, but at every moment of doubt it was my father and mother who motivated me to work harder, push farther, and reach completion. Achieving the highest education possible, they said, was the single greatest assurance of a woman’s independence and security in life. My father is not here to see the thesis to defense and subsequent convocation, but his
presence is rooted in this thesis and its overarching desire to explore land, labour and the histories of everyday people’s struggles from below.

J V Cammaert
Toronto
February 2014
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEWDA</td>
<td>Bawku East Women’s Development Association</td>
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<td>CPP</td>
<td>Convention People’s Party</td>
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<td>NCL</td>
<td>National Liberation Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPP</td>
<td>Northern People’s Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCF</td>
<td>Save the Children Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPP</td>
<td>Northern People’s Party</td>
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<td>NLM</td>
<td>National Liberation Movement</td>
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### Archives Abbreviations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CAOM</td>
<td>Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer, Archives Nationales (de France)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TNA</td>
<td>The National Archives, U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Colonial Office, National Archives, U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Foreign Office, National Archives, U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAGA</td>
<td>National Archives of Ghana, Accra</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAGT</td>
<td>National Archives of Ghana, Tamale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHL</td>
<td>Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMAC</td>
<td>Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, Wellcome Library, U.K.</td>
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Female genital mutilation, nudity, human trafficking and prostitution are all practices decried by the international community as detrimental to the advancement of human rights in Africa. While the goal of eradication continues to capture the imagination and initiative of local, regional, and international actors, few historical studies have explored why and how these practices came to be shaped as harmful to Africans and African development. Policy-oriented development studies often focus on demographic, health, and economic statistics and tend to quantify rather than qualify their subjects in static models that do not stand up to the rigours of historical inquiry. But exploring the histories behind so-called ‘undesirable’ practices holds the potential to reveal more to us than what these policy-oriented development studies suggest. Currently, there is a need for a humanities-oriented approach to balance the overwhelming corpus of social science, policy-driven scholarship. The tools of history are particularly well suited to exploring undesirable practices through the lenses of race, gender, colonialism, and the nation-state in Africa.  

This project arose in part from sustained directed reading and discussion with Janice Boddy on contemporary debates concerning female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM). From a historian’s perspective, Boddy’s historical-anthropological approach demonstrates the need for further historically-influenced approaches. This project seeks to address links between practices – such as FGM - and histories of ‘development’ in Africa. In linking these practices with development history, I draw from M. P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton’s *Doctrines of Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). This project is in no way positivist; it makes no attempt to contribute an opinion on any of the practices discussed. For a survey of the directed reading on genital cutting which helped convince me of the need for this project see, Carla Makhlof Obermeyer and Robert F. Reynolds, “Female Genital Surgeries, Reproductive Health and Sexuality: A Review of the Evidence,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 7, no. 13.
This dissertation seeks to address four practices: female circumcision, child trafficking (pawning and illicit adoption), nudity and prostitution. It brings these practices together through an understanding of their shared construction of ‘undesirability’ in colonial and post-colonial Africa. In Northern Ghana, this set of issues challenged established colonial and post-colonial development: female circumcision debates challenged central tenents of indirect rule in the 1930s whilst pawning, still existent by 1940, complicated officials’ commitment to abolishing slavery in all its forms. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the continuance of nudity posed difficulties surrounding capital accumulation and peasantry in the North, while prostitution and adoption in the 1960s and 70s exposed the failures of agrarian development doctrine in the region’s capital, Tamale. The practices were considered undesirable in colonial Northern Ghana as a result of the international attention they attracted and the debate they incited over development. These were not stand alone issues and at times concern for them overlapped and connections were drawn between one set of practices (female circumcision, for example) and another (nudity). The term ‘undesirable practices’ is taken directly from the Ghanaian archives where it was mobilized prolifically in the first few decades following

independence as a way to discuss practices the nation-state viewed to be “socially undesirable.” In borrowing it from the Ghanaian archives, I am less guilty of imposing foreign terms onto African history than I am of grafting a bureaucratic, post-independence lexicon onto the colonial past.²

The concept of trusteeship drives this dissertation as it forces us to consider these practices, defined by the colonial and post-colonial state as undesirable, within the historical context of development in Africa. The definition of trusteeship utilized in this dissertation is derived from M.P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton’s *Doctrines of Development*. For Cowen and Shenton, trusteeship is defined in its simplest, active meaning as exercising the intent to develop: “Trusteeship is the intent which is expressed, by one source of agency, to develop the capacities of another. It is what binds the process of development to the intent of development.”³ Here, trusteeship is active as it is a binding force. The central question thus becomes this: who is the trustee? In colonial and post-colonial contexts, who exerts trusteeship over another? Who links intent to process? These are integral questions for understanding undesirable practices as sites of struggle in African histories. While the intent to develop may be held by many, the process of development is guarded by those few who assert trusteeship. Development is the prerogative of the few, not the many.

² The first four chapters of this thesis will discuss the various terms colonial officials used to address contentious practices. Often, this terminology differed from official to official, depending upon role. For example, while an anthropologist such as Rattray used the term ‘custom’, his bias against female circumcision made him adopt a stronger, more negative language. British officials in West Africa, however, ensured not to use terms such as ‘repugnant’, which would imply a moral and legislative imperative to intervene. While the adoption of the term ‘undesirable’ is not perfect, it does speak to a general colonial and post-colonial language that is rather ambiguous in connotation.

Often, development is confused with progress whether it be scientific advancements or improvements measured by human development indexes. But in Cowen and Shenton’s formulation, trusteeship does not imply progress. Rather, as a binding force trusteeship prevents us from confusing progress with development. In the context of West Africa, where development took on an agrarian form, colonial development became the opposite of progress. Cowen and Shenton explain that in practice, its intention was to “confront, compensate, and pre-empt this fluidity of movement [from the old to the new] in order to renew the agrarian conditions of development by locking up population in the countryside.”\(^4\) Here, it is the presence of development – rather than absence – that promotes stagnation. Colonial policies concerning undesirable practices were embedded within this agrarian doctrine of development in West Africa. The aim of this dissertation is to suggest that by binding the process of development with the intent of development, trusteeship maintained and even encouraged the very practices experts today decry as detrimental to the advancement of human rights in Africa. This disentangling of progress from development is integral to understanding how undesirable practices were debated, shaped, and regulated in African histories. In short, trusteeship provides a theoretical and conceptual way to explore undesirable practices as sites of struggle in Africa past and present.

Historians of Africa have long treated the body as an important site for broader investigations into social histories. Questions of gender, race, and sexuality factor into the researches of those working on male and female reproductive systems such as Janice Boddy’s work on female circumcision and midwifery in Sudan and Lynn Thomas on

\(^4\) Ibid., xiii.
clitoridectomy and abortion in Meru, Kenya. This dissertation is made possible in part by what these scholars have noted of female circumcision debates in colony and metropole and more particularly by how they point to local African contexts as integral to understanding differentiation in colonial policy and legislation. Like female circumcision, prostitution is also tied to the body and reproduction but as Luise White and Jane Parpart have demonstrated, it was also of prime importance to colonial officials involved in formulating policies from those concerning land and labour to urban planning. Far from a straightforward question of reproduction and Victorian morality, prostitution in African histories became a question of capital accumulation and women’s mobility and access to resources. These linkages between bodily practices and larger questions of land, labour, and resources are often obfuscated by those who have literally read with the archival grain: from the colonial archive, one is given a sense that debates about women were strictly confined to reproduction and morality. Cutting through this rhetoric is equally as important as acknowledging the embedded nature of these practices in colonial doctrines of development. As Barbara Cooper has shown in her work on debates concerning children and malnutrition in post-colonial Niger, contemporary critiques of parenting in times of famine and hardship can be directly linked to long-standing tropes of the ‘bad mother’ in French Soudan.5

I have elected in this dissertation to focus largely on Anglophone sources because of my prime interest in British colonial policy in West Africa. Anne Phillips’ approach to British policy in West Africa sets the foundation for this project’s understanding of why trusteeship played such a large part in debates concerning undesirable practices. In its most basic sense, colonialism was about controlling the social and economic development of Africa’s land, labour, and resources. It was based and justified on the belief that African populations could not manage and develop their own people, property, and authority without the assistance of others. Since trusteeship refers to any person who holds any property, authority, or a position of trust or responsibility for another, the question becomes one of who decides which aspects of African societies should be regulated or eradicated. The debates about these practices were really about struggles for trusteeship and exploring these debates tells us much about how women and gender factored into colonial policies in localized African contexts.

The architects of colonial policy both in the Colonial Office and in the African departments were overwhelmingly male. Though the undesirability of these practices was shaped largely by female and male activists it was male administrators on the ground in Africa that adjudicated how they were dealt with in local contexts. When issues about circumcision or nudity or prostitution were raised, they were often framed by male officials in Africa along female, heterosexual lines. One of the central aims of this dissertation is to question why the practices are gendered this way. Given that African women were frequently thought to be in need of greater trusteeship the question of the place of gender and sexuality in the construction of undesirable practices is an important
To navigate these questions of gender and sexuality, this dissertation draws from the recent works edited by Stephan Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay; Takyiwa Manuh and Catherine Cole; Andrea Cornwall, as well as Ifi Amadiume’s classic texts on gender and sexuality in West Africa. These texts point to the important transformations in gender and age relations occurring prior to and during colonial rule as well as attempts by the colonial and post-colonial state to control these transformations.

Lastly, undesirable practices are not only gendered and sexualized but also racialized as African. Popular media has done much to further this perspective, as discourses of an entrenched, unchanging, singular African culture shape and direct discussions about female circumcision, nudity, human trafficking, and the plight of young girls and children. Female circumcision – once medicalized in Europe and North America – is now commonly referred to by international organizations as ‘female genital mutilation’; nudity continues to sell National Geographic magazines, with photos promising an intimate glimpse of a pristine, traditional ‘African’ untouched by the modern world; the African child, persistently portrayed as impoverished, naked, and.

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defenseless against a background of hunger, trafficking, and prostitution, stimulates the flow of international adoptions from the continent to the West. This dissertation asserts the Africanizing of undesirable practices is an ongoing process. One of its secondary aims is to better understand how these particular practices have come to be associated with Africa and Africans, by exploring the role trusteeship plays in this process.

In conceptualizing trusteeship within a material framework, this project addresses topics that are often the focus of postcolonial scholars, many of whom explore transnational linkages and circulations of knowledge rather than polities. Though this project will employ the important criticisms of postcolonial and transnational scholars concerning undesirable customs it nevertheless remains a project materially and theoretically grounded by colonial policy in West Africa.

1.1 Literature Review: Empire and Undesirable Practices

In applying Cowen and Shenton’s concept of trusteeship, this project takes a structural approach to subjects often considered the purview of imperial and postcolonial historians concerned with women, gender and sexualities in Empire. While imperial historians chart the rise of criticisms of undesirable practices by women activists in imperial Britain, post-colonial scholars and those of ‘new’ imperial history point to

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dialectics of colony and metropole in shaping ‘the woman question.’ This project considers the work of both interdependent fields extremely important to understanding how imperial actors and networks construct undesirable practices in Empire.

In their studies of Empire and its architects, ‘new’ imperial historians have done much in the past few decades to shift focus away from topics related to expansion - ships, battles, explorers, and the Maxim gun – to questions related to the interplay between colony and metropole. Those concerned with women, gender and sexuality in Empire have been instrumental in fomenting this turn: no longer is the field constrained to hagiographies of individual missionaries, explorers, colonial officials, and their activities in ‘the Orient’ or ‘darkest Africa’. Instead, a rejuvenated field of imperial historians question the role of gender in Empire, specifically how feminism and women activists in imperial Britain transgress the perceived separation of public and private space at home and abroad. This turn has done much to further our understanding of the campaigns by which middle and upper-class women created spaces for themselves in imperial Britain.

Clare Midgley’s *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* illustrates the centrality of the woman question in women’s activism in

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10 For an example of such imperial history, see: *Oxford History of British Empire* series.

11 For feminist scholarship that seeks to destabilize the public-private division in Empire and beyond, see: Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates, *Going public: feminism and the shifting boundaries of the private sphere* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2004). See also chapter three in: Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
Empire. Here, the involvement of middle-class women activists and missionaries in campaigns against slavery and *sati*, or ‘widow burning’, illustrate the cultural processes by which undesirable practices are constructed. In debates and activities geared to eradicate slavery and practices such as *sati*, women activists in early imperial Britain exercised a sort of paternalism – or perhaps, maternalism – that Midgley has described as a “duty to help those whom they saw as less privileged than themselves by virtue of their class, race, ethnicity or religion.”¹² That issues such as slavery and *sati* captured the focus of imperial feminists is unsurprising: increasingly by the late 18th century anti-slavery activities in Britain became less of a male domain and more the domain of middle-class women consumers and *sati* came to be seen as an issue upon which “white woman could play the role of saviours of brown women from indigenous patriarchy.”¹³ By placing these debates within larger feminist-activist movements in Britain, imperial women made indigenous practices such as widow burning a *cause celebre*, emblematic of their newly claimed civilizing projects in Empire.

Midgley’s book claims to “throw fascinating new light on the roots of later ‘imperial feminism’ and contemporary debates concerning women’s rights…” and in terms of our understanding of later debates concerning undesirable practices in Africa, this is particularly true. In *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, Susan Pederson builds upon the work of Midgley to explore the life of one of the most notable

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¹² Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865*, 9

¹³ Ibid.
imperial women activists of the early 20th century - Eleanor Rathbone. In her chapter, ‘The Difference Empire Makes’, Pederson describes how Eleanor Rathbone’s preoccupation with ‘the woman question’ shaped her interest in undesirable practices in Britain and in Empire: mobilized by Katherine Mayo’s sensational *Mother India*, the suffragist Rathbone helped to ensure the question of women in India – and later, in Africa – did not escape Parliamentary record. These activities, however, provoked discontent. As a disciple of J.S. Mill, Rathbone’s early work encouraged emancipated British women to lead and uplift Indian women to a higher stage of civilization. It was this belief along with her defense of Mayo that was challenged by Indian women activists, specifically those quick to point out their own gains in combating such social evils. It was Rathbone’s “re-education” as Pederson calls it, at the hands of Indian activists such as Dhanvanthi Rama Rao, which would propel forward her efforts in the 1930s. Through

14 Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004). Susan Pedersen’s work is especially important to this project as she has not only written on Eleanor Rathbone, but also the ‘undesirable’ practices she campaigned against, such as female circumcision in Kenya and *mui tsai* in Hong Kong and Malaya.


18 Ibid.
these discussions, Rathbone came to see the Indian government – not Indian women – as hindering progress. For Rathbone, petitioning colonial government bodies became the best way to press the ‘woman question’ not only in India, but also in Africa.

Rathbone’s pursuit of ‘the woman question’ in India moved her to press the Labour government throughout the 1930s and further provoke colonial officials regarding the status of women in Africa. In this mission, Rathbone joined together with Katherine, Duchess of Atholl, Josiah Wedgwood and others to form a select committee of inquiry into questions related to the status of women and the practice of clitoridectomy, in particular. With the Church of Scotland Mission and various other missionary groups already pursuing the question of clitoridectomy in Kenya, the Parliamentary committee’s efforts worked to promote further unrest among practicing groups in the region, particularly the Kikuyu. With their land in the so-called ‘White Highlands’

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appropriated by white settlers of the newly formed colony, the Kikuyu viewed missionary and governmental interference in clitoridectomy as yet another threat to indigenous rights over culture, land, and social structure. What was seen by Rathbone and other imperial activists to be logical extension of ‘the woman question’ quickly became emblematic of emergent Kikuyu nationalism.\textsuperscript{21} The ‘female circumcision controversy’ of 1928-1931 as it is now known, served as a warning to colonial actors seeking to engage ‘the woman question’ in Africa. In an Empire facing strikes, boycotts, and emergent nationalisms, addressing questions of indigenous women meant further destabilization. While Rathbone and her allies continued to raise concern over practices deemed undesirable in Empire, fresh struggles for trusteeship ensued between male colonial administrators on the ground and those in the Colonial Office.\textsuperscript{22} The West African department’s response to this All-Party Committee questionnaire is the focus of Chapter Two of this dissertation.

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Rathbone and Atholl’s inquiries into the status of women in Africa are especially important to this project as they provide decisive archival evidence for undesirable practices as sites of struggle in African histories. In bringing the woman question to Empire, imperial women activists interrogated Britain’s so-called civilizing mission: what was the nature of this mission; what role did Britain have in abolishing harmful indigenous practices; how far should Britain extend or graft its own cultural, legal, and political mores upon its territories, protectorates and colonies? In challenging this commitment, British activists ensured the woman question would be an integral part of the so-called ‘civilizing mission.’ By publicizing specific practices as undesirable, the Committee posed a challenge to the colonial government’s “monopoloy” on trusteeship in Africa. At the heart of this struggle was Rathbone’s Millian view of civilization in stages. As a feminist she believed that the status of women was the best indicator of an elevated stage. But this equation of development with progress was not shared by those who sought to impose an agrarian doctrine of development and did not view Rathbone’s inquiries as important contributions to the fulfillment of Britain’s dual mandate. Rather, colonial governments in Africa considered the ‘woman question’ a challenge to development. By singling-out undesirable practices as anathemas of progress, Rathbone

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23 Of particular importance to this project are the responses from West African departments, found in: Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

24 Pederson, 242.

25 First published in 1922, Lord Lugard’s Dual Mandate outlined the basic tenants and implementation of indirect rule in Africa. While the importance of ruling through indigenous rulers and avoiding unrest at all costs was central to the dual mandate, the methods used to accomplish this succeeded more in theory than in practice. F.D. Lord Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa. Fifth Edition (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1965).
and her contemporaries sought to link a very particular intent to develop with the process of development. In exercising a rhetorical trusteeship over African women, the duty “to help those whom they saw as less privileged than themselves by virtue of their class, race, ethnicity or religion”, compromised agrarian development doctrine. In seeking to cover-up the Parliamentary inquiries of Rathbone’s Select Committee, West African departments protected their prerogative to develop land and labour. Certainly, if implementing development is the prerogative of the few, not the many, then in British West Africa those few were predominately male colonial administrators – not imperial woman activists.

In their attempts to carve out spaces for female activism in Empire, imperial women helped prepare a terrain upon which undesirable practices would become sites of struggle in both metropole and colony. In focussing on the dialectics of metropole and periphery, the new imperial historians led by Clare Midgley, Catherine Hall, and Susan Pederson, among others place the body at the forefront of metropolitan and colonial histories. Moreover, their focus on mutual constitution challenges us to re-think the colonial project along the lines of postcolonial historians, particularly those concerned with trans-national circulations in Empire. While this project is concerned with the impact of imperial women’s activities on colonial policy in West Africa, it is important to

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26 Midgley, 9

differentiate its appreciation for imperial politics from the important theoretical approaches of postcolonial, trans-national researches.

Like their counterparts in the new imperial history, post-colonial transnational scholars have made the body a worthy site of research in the study of Empire. In discussing prostitution and adoption the contributors to Ann Laura Stoler’s recent edited volume consider the role of intimate spaces in the making and maintenance of colonialism. Eschewing analyses of race, sex and gender bound by borders, Stoler and the contributors follow the “tense and tender ties” in ways that encourage comparison and connections in Empire rather than nations and polities.28 Certainly, this transnational turn has done much to revive comparative histories and enrich understanding of how colonial knowledge of the body is produced, circulated, and applied throughout Empire. However, by embracing such an approach to intimate spaces, the specificity achieved through a singular local or regional scope is sometimes sacrificed.

Some world historians have also sought to focus on the intimate and seek to address these questions without sacrificing local context for global linkages. Focusing less on tracing linkages as it does on ideas of place, Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton’s recent volume Bodies in Contact urges us to view the body as a contact zone.29 The ‘contact zone’ approach provides firmer grounding in local and regional contexts than the transnational turn has hitherto allowed. However, it remains similar in that the


bodies in these contact zones are defined less by material constraints than they are by cultural ones.

Postcolonial scholars concerned with historical geographies have done much to bridge this material – cultural gap. In *Sex, Politics and Empire: A Postcolonial Geography*, Richard Phillips uses the tools of postcolonial historical geography to explore controversies surrounding prostitution, age of consent, and sexualities in Britain’s Empire. In addressing the uneven implementation of Contagious Disease (CD) laws in West Africa, Phillips argues the region was unique in its lack of regulation, pointing to what he calls its “heterogeneity of imperial sexual politics.” For Phillips, however, this heterogeneity is due to the nature of imperial policy in the region, specifically indirect rule. While Phillips’ approach to West African policy is helpful, his understanding of indirect rule as “flexible” or laissez-faire confuses heterogeneity with lack of coherent policy structure. To be fair, this is much a result of his project’s concern for age-old debates among imperial historians regarding flexibility versus fracture in imperial policies. But the result is a regional explanation for uneven sexual politics in West Africa that – while paying lip service to indirect rule – returns us to a postcolonial focus on circulations and comparisons instead of sustained engagement with colonial policy.

While this project disagrees with R. Phillips’ reading of indirect rule as a flexible system, it does value the general argument that colonial policy in British West Africa is

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30 Richard Phillips’, *Sex, Politics and Empire: A postcolonial geography* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 115

31 R. Phillip’s conclusion regarding sexual politics in West Africa is made further problematic by his focus on Sierra Leone, which is unique in its own colonial composition and politics vis-à-vis the rest of the region. Moreover, given his geographic focus, the flexibility Phillips’ sees in indirect rule is difficult to extend to areas where this rule was more vigorously applied, such as Northern Nigeria.
unique and that this uniqueness shaped sexual politics and policies in the region. To understand the material basis for struggles over undesirable practices in British West Africa, this dissertation situates the problem of undesirable practices within the historical materiality of trusteeship and development politics. While working within the space opened by Stoler, it nevertheless seeks to bring attention back toward scholarship grounded in economics, materiality and locality. In turning to social historians of Africa, I look to the work of Anne Philips, who explains the uniqueness of policy there as resulting not from flexibility, but from the ambiguous nature of colonialism in the region. While not interested in undesirable practices or the body, her *The ‘Enigma’ of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa* provides a structural, regional grounding by which to understand undesirable practices as sites of struggle for trusteeship.32

1.2 Undesirable Practices and Colonial Policy in West Africa

In her introductory chapter, ‘The Makeshift Settlement’, Anne Philips explains the ambiguous nature of colonial policy in West Africa not through the flexibility of indirect rule, but rather by a post-First World War consensus she terms the West Africa Policy. This West Africa Policy, she argues, did not always exist in the region but was born with the acknowledgement of officials that local and regional circumstances would inevitably constrain the intended trajectory of colonial development in the region. At the outset, this intended trajectory was no different from those in other areas of Africa where officials dreamt hopeful dreams of ideal relationships between colonialism and capital:

privatization, alienation of land; wage labour; private investment of capital. However, as A. Phillips points out, by the inter-war years a realization of local conditions awoke officials from their slumber.\textsuperscript{33} Derived from the West African Lands Committee (1912-1917), the West African Policy would come to dominate policy, dictating a new consensus in the region based on local constraint and glorification of a peasant road to development. By the inter-war period, this reliance on indigenous rulers and local circumstances ensured policies were guided by local rather than imperial networks of decision-making and policy. Constrained by local circumstances, the unevenness in Contagious Disease laws that the postcolonial historical geographer R. Phillips attributes to European-engineered indirect rule, can be seen rather as a product of locally-defined, pre-existing social and economic conditions in West Africa.

In stressing the local constraints placed upon capitalist expansion in West Africa, Anne Phillips injects new vigor into age-old “balance sheet” debates among historians concerning the positive and negative impacts of colonial rule in Africa.\textsuperscript{34} Instead of viewing colonialism through the binary of benefactor or “one-armed bandit” (as Rodney argues) she moves beyond underdevelopment theorists to explore why colonialism in

\textsuperscript{33} A. Phillips maintains that officials’ reliance on local conditions bred constraint and it was this constraint which precluded the coercion necessary to buttress capitalism. The West African Policy was thus protectionist and seemingly anti-capitalist, not out of choice, but of necessity. Thus, the abilities of officials to effectively and peacefully intervene in a wide-range of issues was not only difficult, it was downright risky.

West Africa failed rather miserably in its purported aim to serve capital. It is in this interrogation of capital that Phillips reveals a portion of her argument central to my argument: under the influence of the West Africa Policy, officials’ seemingly anti-capitalist bias served as a paternalist tool to protect African communities from the destabilizing capitalist forces of the modern economy. Dovetailing with Cowen and Shenton’s analysis of agrarian development doctrine, Phillip’s description that official policy prided itself on “retarding rather than hastening change, drawing on the values of feudalism rather than those of capitalism” is particularly pertinent. Constrained by local circumstances, colonial policy in West Africa sought a doctrine of development predicated upon an idealized peasantry, locked-up in the countryside and protected by a European misapplication of African ‘community’ and ‘tradition.’ For Phillips, the uncertain, ad hoc results of the West Africa Policy did not – and could not – serve capital to the extent that underdevelopment theorists attest. Rather, British policy in West Africa can only be understood as an enigma in colonial Africa.

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35 This sentiment is echoed by Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, who address the impossibility of the colonial state to serve capital in any straightforward or ‘obedient’ way. John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, “Coping with the contradictions: the development of the colonial state in Kenya, 1895-1914,” Journal of African History 20 (1979): 487-505.


37 Ibid.

Though admitting she deals only with land and labour issues, and “not with the entire range of concerns that come under the rubric of ‘development,’” Phillip’s *Enigma of Colonialism* provides a template to understand how the desire to control and retard change links up with ‘undesirable’ practices in West Africa.\(^9\) In making this link, we must remember that the tenuous, messy, historiographical space between benefactor and one-armed bandit that A. Phillips articulated in 1989 is not unfamiliar to present-day historians: it is in precisely this ambiguous space that social historians of women, gender, and sexuality address questions of paternalist, colonial rule over African women. Scholars from Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian on Asante women’s resilience amidst a changing social and economic landscape in Ghana – to Luise White on Nairobi women’s transcending of colonial control through prostitution and the accumulation of capital in a quickly-changing city – to Elizabeth Schmidt on Shona women peasants and traders in Zimbabwe – have long highlighted the various methods officials undertook to control African women’s accumulation and mobility and African women’s struggle against this decline in status.\(^{40}\) Considering the recent work, it is clear that what makes Anne Phillip’s *Enigma* enduring and relevant is not her focus on the unique nature of policy in West Africa, but the questions it raises about what she does not discuss: the West Africa Policy and its impact on African women, gender, and sexuality.

\(^9\) A. Phillips, 14.

Since female circumcision, nudity, prostitution, adoption and pawning especially, were not mere products of a post Second World War human rights discourse, but rather derived from age-old debates about land and labour, Phillip’s focus on local conditions seems fitting to address undesirable practices in West Africa. Indeed, those social historians specializing in undesirable practices have long argued the importance of local and regional political and economic conditions: as Janice Boddy explains of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, colonial officials concern about female circumcision connected with broader fears of a Mahdist revolt. The establishment of midwifery training schools to encourage a safer, medicalized form of circumcision hidden from Parliamentary view is one notable example. In Meru, Kenya, clitoridectomy was encouraged by colonial officials, not out of respect for initiation rites, but as Lynn Thomas argues, as a strategy to stymie local issues of pre-initiation pregnancy resulting in abortion and low labour rates.41 Far from outlawed, prostitution – or, rather the social reproduction it facilitated - was maintained and regulated in areas where capital was better served by colonialism, such as the Zambian copperbelt. Pawning – particularly that of female children – was seen not as ‘slavery,’ but as an inevitable by-product of West African economies struggling to transition from slave labour to wage-labour.42 Arguably, imperial networks and inquiries may have directed discourses on undesirable practices in Empire, but it is


the local relationships between colonialism and capital on the ground that shape how these practices are gender-managed as ‘undesirable’ in African histories.

It seems that undesirable practices are largely neglected from historical researches precisely because of the ‘enigma’ that was colonial rule in British West Africa. Under the West Africa Policy, debates and disputes between imperial women activists, administrators, Governors, anthropologists, and African women themselves fleetingly made their way into the Parliamentary record. While these struggles may be veiled from Parliamentary view, their existence is nonetheless evident upon closer examination of local archives: district officials’ informal diaries; court transcripts; border disputes; anthropological reports; and oral histories. Though no ‘female circumcision controversy’ occurred in West Africa the challenges posed by Atholl’s and Rathbone’s inquiries into the status of women are a reflection of the impermanence of British colonial rule in West Africa.

Earlier in this introduction I suggested that agrarian development doctrine promoted stagnation. This suggestion is particularly provocative when considering undesirable practices and colonial policy of indirect rule in British West Africa. It is no coincidence the theoretical scholarship influencing this project focuses on Nigeria and Ghana - two areas which not only made up much of Britain’s West African trade but also served as laboratories for experiments in indirect rule. The following section will delve deeper into the latter of the two important colonies of the region – Ghana. In focusing on the colony less famously associated with Lugardian-style indirect rule, this project builds

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upon Jeff Grischow’s *Shaping Tradition: Civil Society, Community and Development in Colonial Northern Ghana, 1899-1957*, which demonstrates the applicability of trusteeship to Northern Ghana.

### 1.3 Undesirable Practices and Colonial Policy in Northern Ghana

Focusing on the state’s role in fostering community through blocking civil society, Jeff Grischow’s *Shaping Tradition* applies the arguments of Cowen and Shenton and Anne Phillips in West Africa to the study of development in colonial Northern Ghana. By focusing on the methods by which officials encouraged European understandings of African community Grischow provides a more specific framework in which to understand undesirable practices in West Africa.

Once considered a backwater in British West Africa, Northern Ghana (then Northern Territories of the Gold Coast) has attracted considerable attention from historians seeking to look northward beyond Asante in their studies concerning land, labour and ethnicity in West Africa. From John Parker and Jean Allman’s study of the Talensi Tongnaab shrine and its resilience in the north-east to Sean Hawkins and Carola Lentz’s important debate concerning the imposition of chieftaincies and the shaping of

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ethnicity in the north-west, historians of Northern Ghana have proved the dynamism of a region formerly viewed as a mere migrant labour reserve.\textsuperscript{45} Within this corpus, Grischow’s study on development doctrine is of particular note because it covers a larger geographical scope than Parker and Allman, Lentz, and Hawkins and simultaneously addresses how community was mobilized by the colonial state to further an agrarian doctrine of development implemented following the West African Lands Committee of 1912-1917. In mobilizing community, officials sought to stymie the expansion of civil society – an expansion that was linked to individualism, detribalization, and capital accumulation. On the heels of Depression-era strikes, boycotts, and unrest in the South and seeking to un-do the damage of previous periods of development under the makeshift settlement, Grischow demonstrates how officials sought to protect Northern Ghana through the implementation of indirect rule and its emphasis on trusteeship over tradition and community.

Grischow’s findings demonstrate the applicability of Cowen’s and Shenton’s and Anne Phillips’ approaches to development doctrine and colonial policy in British West Africa, but also the potential for addressing undesirable practices as sites of struggles for trusteeship in Northern Ghana. In charting the methods by which officials sought to mobilize community, Grischow provides the basis for understanding the importance of practices tied to women, gender, and sexuality. Like Anne Phillips, Grischow does not

address questions of gender in colonial policy, and this project therefore seeks to build upon their work to fill this gap in Northern Ghana’s historiography.46

1.4 Focus of the Study

My dissertation focuses primarily on the north-eastern borderland town of Bawku and speaks broadly to Northern Ghana and important administrative towns such as Bolgatanga in the north-east and the capital of the North, Tamale. Since Bawku is a borderland town on a trade route to French West Africa, I also speak to important French towns cited in district correspondence. Two towns mentioned often in informal district diaries are Sansemango located to the east of Bawku in French Togoland and Tenkudugo, located to the north of Bawku in then French Upper Volta. These towns in French jurisdiction influenced administrators in Bawku because of shared trade routes and border disputes over land and labour migration. It is arguable that these Anglo-French interactions influenced local administrators as much if not more than directives from the capital of the Gold Coast, Accra.

Though the town of Bawku is the primary focus of this study I do not seek to exhaustively discuss the borderland communities residing in and surrounding the town of Bawku. The groups that are of particular importance to this study are those in the north-east that are most often cited in archives pertaining to undesirable customs as well as those whose presence is most significant to the political administrative climate of colonial and post-colonial Bawku. These include the Kusasi, who reside in Bawku town and

Bawku east as well as Bawku west, and the Mamprusi, who are also of Bawku town and Bawku east. Groups residing on either side of the Anglo-French border such as the Busanga and Yanga are also important to this study. Borderland groups such as those mentioned here are particularly sensitive to study as these groups were caught in the protracted administrative confusion caused by the partitioning and re-partitioning of the north-eastern frontier in 1902 and then again in 1921 with the Togoland mandate. Also, given the fluidity of the borderlands and the incredible growth of Bawku during the colonial period it is difficult to ascertain when particular groups settled in Bawku and for what duration. As this study will show, groups residing outside of Ghana’s national borders – such as Busanga and Yanga, often labelled as ‘foreigners,’ are sometimes blamed for introducing or promoting undesirable practices into Ghana. While this study is not transnational, it does take the border and the work of borderlands scholars as important to understanding how peoples circumvented and transgressed colonial attempts to control movement of peoples, goods, and illicit practices along the borderlands of West Africa.  

1.5 Scope, Timeline, and Structure

This study takes a select range of undesirable practices as its research focus. These practices – female circumcision, pawning, nudity, and prostitution and adoption – were selected for several reasons. First and most important, the above practices were chosen because of the frequency of debates surrounding their continuance, as found in the

Tamale Regional Archives and the archives in Accra. The research scope of this study was entirely archive-driven. Second, these practices were not discussed only for their supposed problematic nature. Rather, they were mentioned because of the extent to which they provoked debate. The debate was local, but involved various actors and interests of local, regional, national, and international scales.

This introduction has dealt primarily with the colonial period, but since localized struggles over undesirable practices in Northern Ghana included more than one controversy (e.g., Kenya’s female circumcision controversy), this project extends its timeline into post-independence Africa. As colonial rule continued into the 1940s, West Africa Policy showed its failure in restraining the forces of local accumulation that ultimately led to decolonization. As Phillip’s explains: “Decolonization was to this extent a recognition of the failures of colonialism rather than a response to the powers of nationalism.”48 The claim of bringing stability and order which served to justify incursion into the interior following abolition of slavery was never fully realized. As discussed in the latter chapters of this project, post-independence Ghana struggled to move beyond these failures. While post-independence rhetoric surrounding undesirable practices seemed more in line with the prevailing modernization discourse of the times, the early Ghanaian state continued along similar paths of agrarian development in Northern Ghana as had its predecessor. Unsurprisingly, challenges to trusteeship posed by Cold War politics, United Nations and related organizations such as Save the Children’s Fund, ensured struggles over undesirable practices continued into the post-colonial period. This thesis will discuss these undesirable practices through an

examination of these continuities from Northern Ghana’s colonial to post-independence period.

This study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 discusses British colonial policy in West Africa and explains how haphazard indirect rule policies allowed for certain practices to become terrains of struggle upon which various colonial actors competed for the role of trustee. Chapter Three works to explain the construction of these practices as ‘undesirable,’ focussing particularly on the role of anthropologists in British colonial West Africa. In particular, this chapter looks at an important disagreement between first government anthropologist R.S. Rattray and the Gold Coast administration concerning female circumcision. Chapter 4 moves on to address female circumcision in the 1930s and the struggles between actors who sought to influence policy regarding the practice in interwar West Africa. Chapter Five discusses slavery, and the practice of female pawning in particular, as a persistent undesirable practice in 1940s Ghana. In particular, this chapter discusses a court transcript that debated whether three female children should be considered slaves or, more benignly, as pawns in north-eastern Ghana. Chapter 6 marks the shift to post-independence Ghana. This chapter discusses post-independence campaigns against nudity in the Nkrumah era. In particular, this chapter addresses the domestic and international context of anti-nudity campaigns. Finally, Chapter 7 will discuss a range of undesirable practices associated with children and youth in Northern Ghana following Nkrumah’s overthrow. In particular, this chapter addresses the difficulties of post-coup governments in asserting claims to trusteeship over Ghanaian children and youth in the face of increasing international claims to the same.
1.6 Conclusion: Trusteeship and Undesirable Practices

This introduction asks us to consider the following possibility: that in binding the process of development to the intent of development through agrarian doctrine in Northern Ghana, trusteeship did much to maintain if not encourage the very practices experts decry as detrimental to the advancement of human rights in Africa. In considering such a possibility, this project is not satisfied with invoking ‘tradition’ at all, and especially not as a resilient or static category. A problematic concept at best, ‘tradition’ does little analytical work beyond the standard formula of labelling certain practices traditional, whittling about what constitutes tradition, and concluding with a sweeping analysis that undesirable practices are simply resilient to colonial rule. On the other hand, this project does not suggest that these practices would no longer exist had capital succeeded in its expansion in colonial West Africa. While the impact of capital can be more easily traced to an issue that is less common today – such as nudity – because of its link to consumption, this link in no way suggests the relationship to be straightforward. Struggles for trusteeship were simply part of strained attempts by officials to impose development doctrine and to assume or treat capital as though it had autonomous logic is to ignore its base in relations of production.

In drawing on Cowen’s and Shenton’s concept of trusteeship, this project rather seeks to turn what we know – or what we think we know – about undesirable practices and development on its head. And in focusing this trusteeship on local circumstances of West African Policy, this project seeks to ground theory in local historical context. What follows is not a parochial study into the discursive constitution of undesirable practices in north-eastern Ghana, but a gendered contribution to the field of ‘genealogies of
development’ through a historical approach to contemporary human rights issues in West Africa.
Chapter 2

‘Die a Natural Death’: Responses to the Questionnaire on Customs Affecting the Status of Women in West Africa c. 1930

In the Enigma of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa, Anne Phillips writes: “The acute sensitivity to unrest, often long before events would confirm the initial suspicions indicates the weakness at the heart of the colonial service. Suspended as they were over societies in the throes of transition, lacking as they did even the partial legitimacy of elected governments, administrators took the path of least resistance.” The gendered nature of these ‘paths of least resistance’ is not taken up by Phillips despite the fact shifting gender relations in 1930s West Africa had provoked officials to view inquiries regarding women and women’s status with great unease. This chapter discusses the West Africa department’s responses in 1930 to a questionnaire about Customs Affecting the Status of Women and reveals how in their eagerness to tighten patriarchal control and prevent unrest, officials in West Africa hesitated to address inter-war Parliamentary concerns regarding female circumcision practices. The responses to Atholl’s questionnaire in 1930 demonstrate precisely the extent to which regional colonial policy governed questions concerning women in West Africa.

In 1930, the Governors of the Gold Coast, Gambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone responded to a questionnaire entitled, “ Customs Affecting the Status of Native Women and Children in West Africa”. They stated that the status of women in Africa was equal

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49 A. Phillips, 159.
to if not better than men and that the extent of female circumcision practices in West Africa did not merit legislation. The questionnaire originated from the earlier inquiries of Eleanor Rathbone, Katherine, the Duchess of Atholl, and Colonel Wedgewood into the question of initiation and clitoridectomy of Kikuyu girls in Kenya, East Africa.\textsuperscript{50} In the latter 1920s, significant backlash had resulted from the Select Committee on Rights and Status of Colonial Women’s efforts to intervene in the practice and in certain districts Kikuyu employed various strategies to protest abolishment of the initiation rite.\textsuperscript{51} With Governor Grigg left to manage the controversy in Kenya, the Committee turned its attention beyond British enclaves of white settlers and missionaries. By 1929 the issue of female circumcision had become contentious in Kenya and Atholl began devising a questionnaire for Passfield to send out all to Colonial Governors concerning the status of women.\textsuperscript{52} It reads:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Suggested Questions for Circulation to Governors and High Commissioners of Colonies and Protected and Mandated Territories}

1. Do the following customs exist among the tribes under your jurisdiction? If so, among what tribes do they exist, and what information can you supply as to their nature, and as to the injuries they inflict on the health, morale and status of girls and women and the health of children who may be born to them? What efforts, direct or indirect, are being made by Government or other agencies, to combat them; what official protection is afforded to any girl who desired to escape from them; and what further action do you consider to be possible? Have you any information as to the origins of these customs, and what evidences are there that native opinion is turning against them?

(1) Circumcision of girls as a preliminary to marriage (All forms of this custom)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50} Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

\textsuperscript{51} Jocelyn Murray, "The Kikuyu Female Circumcision Controversy, with Special Reference to the Church Missionary Society’s ‘Sphere of Influence’ " (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1974)

\textsuperscript{52} Duchess of Atholl to Passfield, December 23, 1929, Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930, TNA, U.K., CO 323/1067/1
Forced fattening of girls as a preliminary to marriage.

2. Do you know of any other customs injurious to girls or women? If so please deal with them as above.

3. Are there any injurious or barbarous customs practiced in childbirth, or in connection with sick or dying people? If so, what steps officials or unofficial are being taken to combat these? What further action is possible?

4. Do abnormally born or twin children and their mothers suffer in any special way? If so, how is this evil being dealt with and what further action is possible?

5. Are vital statistics available? If so, what were a) the birth rate, b) infant mortality rate, c) maternal mortality rate, for the last ten years? If no vital statistics are available, would there be serious difficulty in securing them?

6. What is the extent of the provision of hospitals, midwives, infant welfare and any other health services made a) by Government direct and b) by missions aided by Government grant? How far do women take advantage of these hospitals, and in how many are there women on the staff? What extension of these services do you consider to be most urgent, and how do you consider they can be best provided?

What is the nature and extent of education for girls; how far is this provided direct by the Government and how far by missionary bodies aided by grant? In what direction do you feel extension most desirable, and how would you propose to secure this? What difficulties if any, bar the way?

What protection does a) the law, b) British Administration, provide for women who wish to avoid a marriage they hate, or to escape from a brutal husband? What limits are there to what relations and husbands may do? Is cruelty of this sort condoned by native public opinion? How is marital infidelity in a woman punished? How far is the woman free, how far the property of father or husband what right has a wife to her children?

What is the person status of a woman as respect her own rights over her person, her minor children, or her husband’s property? Is there any social stigma attached to the widow? What is being done to remedy this if it exists? If a widow has no property rights what status of livelihood are open to her?

Is there much prostitution? If so, do any special native customs minister to it? Is there any procuring of girls?

To what extent can native women own a) personal and b) real property?

Are women given any protection against the performance of heavy labour, such as road-making?

Generally, what can be done 1) by legislation 2) by education, 3) financial assistance to unofficial bodies.
a) to put an end to cruelty to women?
b) to raise the status of women?\textsuperscript{53}

Passfield was hesitant to send the questionnaire to West Africa because he felt its questions particularly unsuited to the region, given its steady population growth.\textsuperscript{54}

African women under colonial rule were viewed in primarily productive and reproductive terms. They were especially valued as slaves in Africa for these very reasons and as slavery and related forms of dependency continued after formal colonial rule, women remained implicated within larger questions of free and unfree labour.\textsuperscript{55} By 1930 the question of women’s status in the colonies had become particularly pressing. Anti-slavery societies had long been invested in questions of slavery. British women activists in particular linked slavery and African women’s status framing the latter as something akin to slavery. Atholl’s Select Committee on Rights and Status of Colonial Women found support in the ‘National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship’ which petitioned

\textsuperscript{53} Suggested Questions for Circulation to Governors and High Commissioners of Colonies and Protected and Mandated Territories, \textit{Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930}, TNA, U.K., CO 323/1067/1

\textsuperscript{54} Draft, Passfield to West Africa departments of Gambia, Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, 8 March 1930, \textit{Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

Passfield to take the questionnaire seriously. In 1930, it was circulated to all British colonies, dependencies, and territories in Africa.

Passfield was aware the questionnaire would incite resentment among officials in Africa. In his dispatch he noted how pressed governments were for funds already and was quick to acknowledge the existing efforts of Medical and Sanitation Departments to promote health and welfare on these slight budgets. The questionnaire’s suggestions on how to improve women’s status required funds where funds did not exist. Moreover, there was the added concern of manpower, since in order to answer the questionnaire, colonial officials would have to ascertain detailed information on women and women’s customs. Here, the problem was not only that of funds, but also how male officials, who were at best amateur ethnographers, would gain access to such sensitive information.

Overall, the questionnaire was viewed by Governors throughout British Africa as bothersome. In West Africa the implications of such an extensive inquiry raised a number of unique concerns. The backlash against European intervention in female circumcision practices and *irua* initiation among the Kikuyu in Kenya buttressed existing nationalist

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57 Outside of Africa, the questionnaire was sent to British territories such as Fiji, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate and the New Hebrides.

58 Draft. Passfield to West Africa departments of Gambia, Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. 8 March 1930, *Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930*, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

59 This is particularly true among Muslims in the Gambia, Sierra Leone Protectorate, Northern Territories of the Gold Coast and Northern Nigeria as well as within the substantial Muslim *zongos* (communities) established in the south. In Northern Nigeria, where *purdah* (seclusion of women) was practiced and is found to have increased during the colonial period, the ability for male officials to acquire any real knowledge of women and women’s status was slim indeed.
sentiments in east Africa. West African officials worried what would happen to non-settler, cash-crop, communalist West Africa if the questionnaire sparked similar unrest. These fears were voiced throughout British West Africa and the potential impact of the questionnaire was even commented on in the newspaper *Sierra Leone Guardian*. It reads:

According to *West Africa* a Duchess in Parliament [Atholl] asked certain questions and the answer she got leads one to infer that the Government anticipate [sic] interfering with the 'Bundo Society.' I have not the paper by me but as far as I remember, she suggested that the 'Cruel practice of excision' be stopped. Now the question arises, What does this aristocrat know about Bundo? And further, have the African women ever complained about it? Does she know that this Society is for the most part highly respected by the natives of Africa, and that the idea of excision is to lessen the carnal desire in a girl destined to be the wife of a husband openly or covertly polygamous? The issues involved are serious, and if the Labour Government is looking for trouble in Africa let them interfere forcibly with the Bundo or kindred Societies entirely feminine. They will get it. And I am afraid that as in the Nigerian incident blood may be shed. The women will not take it lying down. The Slogan should be ‘CA CANNY’ for the African woman is extremely conservative. The Bundo and similar societies, all over the coast date from antiquity, and more they are secret societies, therefore any reformation must come from within. Reformation by legislation spells trouble and I hope other West African Journals will express an opinion on the subject and not leave the ‘Guardian’ crying in the wilderness.

This letter to the *Sierra Leone Guardian* demonstrates the patronizing tone of trusteeship undergirding officials’ attitudes toward African women. The impossibility of a women aristocrat knowing more about African women than male colonial officials and the

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60 Letter from the *Sierra Leone Guardian*, 14 February, 1930, *Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930*, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1. The *Sierra Leone Guardian* was edited by J.S. Labor who was a Krio with Jamaican origins.
presumptions of those same officials that an African woman could and would look to them to intervene in the practice in the first place all point to the naïve world-view indulged by members of the colonial bureaucracy. The excerpt’s warning that ‘as in the Nigerian incident, blood may be shed’ is indicative of how fearful officials were to provoke ‘conservative’ women’s unrest following 1929 Women’s War in south-eastern Nigeria. Male – likely Creole – editors expressed a clear desire to speak for African women not so much to give them ‘voice’ or demonstrate a genuine concern for their status, but to tighten patriarchal control and prevent women’s revolt and ‘bloodshed.’ The Women’s War affected the way officials perceived the Select Committee’s questionnaire. Women’s protest in Owerri province of south-eastern Nigeria had seemed to officials to come as a “lightning bolt out of the sky.” Officials were completely unaware that changes – even rumours of changes – in census and tax collection might spark unrest among market women. The apparent abruptness with which the protests began demonstrated to them how little they knew about women and what could provoke their unrest.

61 My archival research indicates that at least in Bawku, many women did come to district officials with palavers, particularly regarding domestic disputes and marriage agreements. It was particularly common for women to use colonial courts if they were not satisfied with rulings of customary tribunals. This is certainly the logic which this particular writer is using. But it nevertheless is guilty of assuming African women viewed white colonial officials as saviors. While officials may have intervened in domestic marriage disputes, initiation societies were part of a different sort of patriarchy within which women had the prerogative.


63 Fitfully, officials began to introduce taxation to the Gold Coast in the 1850s, but repealed it within a decade when faced with refusal to pay. By 1896, they tried again, introducing a hut tax in the northern protectorate of Sierra Leone. This also was met with unrest, leaving 1,000 people dead. Though officials enforced legislation, the war served as a potent warning to officials who sought to forcefully impose legislation affecting land and labour.
The questionnaire was full of detailed suggestions for changes or improvements to women’s health and status in Africa. In particular, its focus on initiation and secret societies raised fears among officials. Initiation was gendered and secret societies where female circumcision was practiced were the prerogative of women. Since initiation societies were present throughout British West Africa, Atholl’s questionnaire carried the potential to elicit protest on a much larger regional scale than the 1929 incident.  

Officials chose to take the path of least resistance. The West Africa department’s responses to Atholl’s questionnaire were constructed in a way that would dissuade further interest in women’s status and female circumcision. Their fears were not exaggerated. Official logic in West Africa governed the myth of an economically and politically stable region. Measures thought to have the potential to destabilize were quickly shelved. Though Anne Phillip’s work does not speak to women and gender, it is clear that these departmental responses in West Africa implicated women and gender. This is particularly clear when officials address questions of women and slavery as many of their comments are geared toward disentangling questions of women’s status from questions of slavery. Since concerns about female circumcision had much to do with the perceived brutality of the practice, officials also sought to disentangle initiation from circumcision and circumcision in West Africa from those forms perceived to be more severe which were practiced in Kenya.

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64 I argue on a much larger scale because while the 1929 Igbo women’s war pertained specifically to south-eastern Nigeria, intervention and especially legislative intervention in initiation would affect large swathes of West African societies, cutting across ethnic and linguistic lines creating the unity necessary to incite a large and perhaps successful challenge to colonial rule.
Responses from each department differ in length and detail provided. Questions pertaining to women’s rights and labour, education and female associations within which female circumcision was practiced were given particular attention. It is clear the departments aimed to alter the Committee’s pre-conceptions of African women’s status and above all discourage disruptive legislation.\textsuperscript{65} To accomplish this, Governors used the paternalistic language of trusteeship. This paternalist rhetoric is most pronounced in the Gold Coast and Nigerian responses as these were colonies most important to trade and thus colonial policy in West Africa. Furthermore, the interior regions of these colonies, as well as the Northern Protectorate of Sierra Leone, heavily reference existing women’s associations. One reason for this is that initiation and secret societies were governed by age-relations and in regions where indirect rule systems were in place patriarchal institutions were perceived to regulate and support native authority. Embedded within this concern for indirect rule was the question of religion. Officials in the Gambia and Northern Nigeria with large Muslim populations wrote about female circumcision within the broader context of Islam.\textsuperscript{66} In these interior regions, legislation against female circumcision was viewed as both precipitous and unenforceable. Instead, gradual education was viewed as an acceptable solution. But even suggestions of training African midwives were not without issue and Governors discussed the potential benefits and hazards of expanding maternity hospitals and midwifery training beyond coastal areas. A tone of hesitancy pervades all responses as Governors desired the customs affecting

\textsuperscript{65} Minutes, A. Bevir, September 22, 1930, Native Women & Children – Customs Affecting West Africa. Sub File II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067

\textsuperscript{66} This is despite the fact that both Bundu and Sande societies in Sierra Leone are not Islamic institutions.
native women and children to simply die-out gradually as West African societies progressed along the ‘steep slope to civilization.’

These concerns shaped the tone in which the departmental responses were collected and written. As Barbara Cooper notes, colonial archives often do not mention women much or do so in a perfunctory fashion limiting discussion of them to reproductive terms. Scholars such as Nakanyike Musisi go so far as to admit they initially refused to work with colonial archives on account of this overwhelming male bias. Though limited in terms of African women’s own experiences, the departmental responses reveal how officials perceived and responded to women’s issue. As the architects of colonial policy in a region devoid of settler interests officials implemented the policies which would affect the transformations in the economy of gender-relations that took place in the 1930s. Therefore, understanding male officials’ attitudes toward African women and their status under colonial rule is imperative. The newspaper excerpts, anecdotes and opinions from district officials and amateur ethnographers, and reports from British-commissioned studies indicate increasing official concerns about women and the control of women during this period of transformation and upheaval. Ultimately, this tells us much about the sorts of livelihood strategies women deployed in the new colonial economy.

This discussion of male bias is suggestive of how and for what audience the West Africa department responses are shaped in a region influenced by indirect and direct

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styles of colonial rule. In the 1930s the French government, for example, was also conducting inquiries into the status of women in West Africa, but did not rely on male informants alone. Ghislaine Lydon has made note of this in her analysis of an under-examined 1930s report on women in francophone West Africa entitled, “La famille en AOF: condition de la femme.” The report, conducted by Madame Denise Moral Savineau, totals one-thousand pages and was commissioned by the then Governor-General of French West Africa (AOF). Unlike its British counterpart, it seems to have involved extensive travelling by Savineau who conducted interviews with both men and women throughout francophone West Africa. While both British and French inquiries reflected increasing metropolitan interest in the status of African women and children, Savineau undertook fieldwork herself and largely distrusted commentary from colonial officials. Lydon’s work points to the differing methodologies of British and French governments and such differences tell us much about variations between direct and indirect rule and the importance of gender in shaping colonial policy in British West Africa.

2.1 Background: 1930s transformations in gender relations

Though women are largely absent from the colonial archives, their importance in social, economic and political aspects of West African societies ensured the responses

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71 Ibid.
were carefully crafted. For example, women’s involvement in local and long-distance trade as well as agricultural production was pronounced in pre-colonial times and unlike many other urban spaces in Africa, women held a significant presence in the long-distance trade passing through urban centers. Furthermore, the nineteenth century expansion of Islam was facilitated by prominent women teachers as well as men. Along the coast Mende women chiefs in Sierra Leone rose to power in female associations, acting as powerful figures in the management of land, resources and trade. On the other hand, women’s importance in production balanced with their reproductive forces ensured slaves in Africa were often women. Added to this, male control over land and labour assured slavery in Africa remained largely gendered. Neither all powerful or ‘victims’ women held the potential to transgress colonial authority and assert pre-colonial strategies of protest and autonomy as was demonstrated through the Igbo women’s strategy of protest called ‘sitting on a man.’ Rather than completely undo women’s pre-existing power and autonomy, colonial rule altered gender relations. By the circulation of Atholl’s questionnaire in 1930, these changes were well underway in West Africa due to the introduction and intensification of cash crop agriculture. Though working to strip many women of their previous authority and autonomy, new opportunities were


73 Lynda Day, “Nyarroh and Bandasuma, 1885-1914: A Re-Interpretation of Female Chieftaincy in Sierra Leone,” *Journal of African History* 48 (2007): 415-37. For example, officials had to collaborate with the Mende woman chief Nyarroh of Bandasuma, whose power extended over initiation and important resources, provides case and point.

presented and the unevenness of these opportunities allowed some women to circumvent and frustrate officials’ increasing efforts to control and restrict accumulation and mobility. The significance of women in pre-colonial economies combined with tumultuous gender transformations in the 1930s led officials’ to focus on controlling women’s independence.  

For officials striving to assert control, the goal was to return gender relations to what they once were or at least what officials, working on information from male elders, believed them to have been. For example, previous to formal colonial rule West African women exercised power and autonomy through matrilineal systems, female associations and positions within ruling royal families. With matrilineal systems, a woman’s male relatives, particularly her uncle, were placed at the center of kinship and family. This was an arrangement which often allowed women to live close to their place of birth, maintain access to land and authority over their children.

Women also enjoyed opportunities for mutual assistance and upward mobility through female associations. In West Africa, many female associations were based upon trading networks where successful traders could rise through ranks to positions of leadership. Among the Yoruba, the iyalode trading association was well established and along the West African coast market traders such as Alimota Pelewura Madam Tinubu and Omu Okwei became prominent intermediaries with European traders. These female  

75 Acting Governor of the Gambia, CRM Northman, 26 July, 1930, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

76 For more on West African market traders, especially Nigerian women market traders see: Nina Emma Mba, Nigerian women mobilized: women’s political activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965. Research Series no. 048 (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1982); Nwando Achebe, Farmers, traders, warriors, and kings: female power and authority in northern Igbo land, 1900-
associations were often complementary to men’s organizations and aside from controlling agriculture and trade, women exerted authority over religious roles and initiation of prepubescent girls. Finally, elite women also enjoyed positions of power within royal houses. Examples include Queen Nzinga of Kongo and Queen Amina of Zazzu, who ruled over the sixteenth century states of Kano and Katsina in modern day Nigeria. These women in positions of leadership often came in contact with European traders and settlers along the east, south and West African coasts as is reflected in many early European accounts. These women came from societies which recognized the duality of male and female leadership and their elevated positions in society influenced how officials imagined African women.

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77 This is despite the fact the Hausa were not matrilineal. Sheldon, *The Historical Dictionary of Women in sub-Saharan Africa*, xxx-xxxii.

78 This fixation on women’s power and autonomy as it related to political institutions and military expansion resulted in the presence of elite women in colonial archives. In her 1988 survey of the field, Margaret Jean Hay points out a relatively large amount of written archival material on elite or high-status African women. She argues that aside from prostitutes and peasants, the study of queenly roles of women in traditional societies made up much of the 1980s field on women in African histories. More recent writings from scholars John Thornton on Queen Njinga (1624-1663) to Nakanyike B. Musisi on Buganda’s Queen Mother Irene Drusilla Namaganda and Lynda Day on re-conceptualizing female chiefs in Sierra Leone, demonstrate the continued importance of elite women in African histories. John K. Thornton, “Legitimacy and Political Power: Queen Njinga, 1624-1663” in *The Journal of African History* Vol. 32, No. 1 (1991): 25-40; Nakanyike B. Musisi, “A Personal Journey into Custom, Identity, Power and Politics: Researching and Writing the Life and Times of Buganda’s Queen Mother Irene Drusilla Namaganda (1896-1857)” in *History in Africa* Vol. 23 (1996): 369-385; Lynda Day, “Nyarroh and Bandasuma, 1885-1914: A Re-Interpretation of Female Chieftaincy in Sierra Leone.”

79 Sheldon, xxx-xxxii.
Governors celebrated these references to pre-colonial women’s authority, choosing to treat them as static and traditional examples of gender relations that though present prior to the introduction of cash crops still existed in West Africa. Reaching back into an idealized past, the Gold Coast Governor responded directly to Atholl’s query about women’s rights to children by citing the matrilineal Akan as enjoying “complete equality with men in every respect.” While it is true that matrilineality provided sustained access for women to their maternal homes and the opportunity for their children to remain with them as they belonged to their mother’s sorority group, by the 1930s colonialism and cocoa had worked to decrease the measure of access to land and resources matrilineality provided. As Jean Allman notes, marriage in Asante was increasingly governed in courts by chiefs and elders became more of a rigid, one-sided affair where men were released from the reciprocity that had earlier characterized marriage arrangements. Rather than a focus on the kinship unit of the maternal lineage, colonial rule increasingly made marriage into a husband and wife dynamic in which

80 Much of this stemmed from 19th century beliefs that Africa lacked historicity. The transitions(transformations which took place in African societies during the colonial period were believed by many to be the first major break with ‘traditional’ life and lifestyle. This intersects with narratives describing Africans as children and colonial officials as parents; trusteeship was narrated in various ways but all toward the same ends of maintaining and justifying colonial rule.

81 Gold Coast, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA, U.K., CO 323/1067/1 In the Gold Coast case, it is likely Governor Slater sources his remarks from R.A. Rattray’s work among the Akan in Asante during the 1920s. The Gold Coast despatch was referring to the relative autonomy of Akan women when in 1900 administrators faced fierce demands led by Asante Queen Yaa Asantewa for the Golden Stool. By 1930, Rattray had completed fieldwork in the Northern Territories and, given his fascination with matrilineality, gender relations among the Akan would have contrasted with lineage structures in the Northern Territories. By and large the training and deployment of anthropologists within the colonial service was still in its nascent stage.

82 It is important to note that the Akan are comprised of a number of named groups who speak related language and have common cultural patterns.
women became more dependent upon their husbands for support as ‘breadwinners.’

What’s more, men began to assert more control over their children and ‘big men’ accumulated wives as a mark of status in the new cocoa economy. The salient gender dynamic shifted from a focus on brothers and sisters to one that foregrounded husband and wife.

Undeniably, the new cocoa economy increased women’s labour burden and while officials could deny Atholl’s query of women’s heavy labour in aspects such as road-making, scholars agree that women’s overall burden of agricultural labour intensified with colonialism. 

Previously, men’s work and women’s work were complementary, and depending on the region in question, men’s work could include land clearing, house building, cloth weaving, herding, hunting and military duties. Women’s work was similarly varied, including food production, storage, processing and preparation, the manufacturing of pottery, baskets, mats and clothing, care of children and the sick, and responsibility of feeding their families.

It is a point which the Governor of Sierra Leone does not fail to misrepresent when he reported, “A very nice division of labour between the sexes in Sierra Leone, the heavy duties in farming and house-building being always performed by men and the lighter ones, e.g. weeding farms and daubing houses falling to women…” With colonial rule, export-focused administrations placed huge emphasis on

83 Lindsay, ”Money, Marriage, and Masculinity on the Colonial Nigerian Railway,” 138-154


86 Sierra Leone Governor to Colonial Office, 17 May 1930, Native Women and Children - Customs Affecting, West Africa. 1930. Sub-File II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067
extracting economic surplus. As a result, agricultural production intensified, complicating these supposed tidy divisions of labour. With men migrating for wage-labour, the additional labour burdens fell upon women. As officials recruited, coerced or manipulated male labour to plantations or colonial infrastructure projects, women were increasingly burdened with household production on land that was not their own. Export crops strengthened male dominance over both cash and land as men bought up land and trees. In colonial Gambia and Senegal, for example, land ownership patterns began to change with the introduction of groundnut production. Prior to colonial rule, women were in charge of rice cultivation, but now women were expected to grow subsistence crops and work in rice production as well. In north-eastern Ghana, migrant male labourers left household lands to women to work only to return and chastise women for any ‘mistakes’ they may have made regarding land or livestock during their absence.87 By the 1930s, the “nice division of labour between the sexes” the Sierra Leone Governor claimed was already undergoing significant transformation.88

Of course, it is true that not all women’s power diminished under colonial rule and scholars seeking to re-assess the ‘victim’ narrative identify instances where women took advantage of unanticipated avenues for capital accumulation that colonial rule

87 Group Interview at BEWDA headquarters, 30 October 2010, Bawku Township, Bawku, Upper East Region, Ghana. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the Bawku East Women’s Development Association (BEWDA) for allowing me to conduct interviews at its facilities. In the interest of protecting interview participants as well as BEWDA all names have been kept confidential. The views expressed in this article are those of my own, and are not to be confused with, or taken as a reflection of, the views or politics of BEWDA.

88 Gold Coast, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
Women’s roles began to change and diversify under cocoa production and some were able to assert their autonomy in the cash economy. Increasingly, women turned to trade as a way to gain greater control of their capital production. Moreover, it must be noted that at times colonial rule did weaken patriarchal control over women, lessen potential for torture, slavery or death, and provided avenues for divorce.\(^9\) Even in remote areas of the West African interior, colonial courts did create avenues – at times, unintended – for women to assert their independence in marriage cases.\(^1\) But these examples of women making the most of opportunities afforded by social and economic transformations did not justify the Governor of the Gambia’s claim in his response that women’s status in his jurisdiction was ‘always improving.’\(^2\) Rather, the appearance of women’s status as improving lent itself more to officials’ preoccupations with women having too much independence by the 1930s.\(^3\) The shifting power relationships that worked to some women’s advantage led to manufactured moral crises framed in the

\(^{89}\) As Claire Robertson and Nupur Chaudhuri remind, “the status of agent and of victim are not at two poles and mutually exclusive”, especially since even victims can assert agency albeit in limited ways. Claire C. Robertson and Nupur Chaudhuri, “Editors’ Note: Revising the Experiences of Colonized Women: Beyond Binaries,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14 no. 4 (Winter 2003): 6-14.

\(^{90}\) Koopman, 3-22.


\(^{92}\) Report by the Acting Governor of the Gambia, CRM Northman, 26 July, 1930, *Native Women and Children Customs Affecting, West Africa. 1930. Sub-File II*, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

\(^{93}\) Ibid.
colonial archives as ‘gender chaos’ or ‘wayward women.’ In southern Africa, for example, women who travelled to urban areas looking for new opportunities came to be viewed as ‘wayward’ by officials who interpreted urban spaces as quintessentially male. Increasingly officials had begun to view women as transgressing the traditional order colonial officials and male elders had invented or shaped for the purposes of indirect rule. A more accurate reading of officials’ desires in 1930 West Africa is found in the Governor of the Gambia’s blunt statement that “It would probably be better for all concerned if the men had more control over their female relations.”

2.2 Of Slavery and Status: Women in West Africa

The desire to, at least on paper, represent women’s status and gender relations as static, unchanging and complementary to men’s is exemplary of broader colonial aims in West Africa to restore the region to an imagined pre-colonial order before the ravages of the Atlantic slave trade. Of the many justifications for colonial incursion, abolishing slavery and restoring peace and order was paramount. The question of women and women’s status was therefore intimately connected to metropolitan scrutiny of slavery and its persistence in Africa and this is why Atholl’s references to women and slavery provoked particular rebuke. “It has been further represented to the Secretary of State,” wrote the Commissioner of the Northern Province of Sierra Leone, “that the status of

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96 Report by the Acting Governor of the Gambia, CRM Northman, 26 July, 1930, Native Women and Children Customs Affecting, West Africa. 1930. Sub-File II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
native women in some places is scarcely distinct from slavery. I am emphatically of opinion that this is not so in Sierra Leone.”

Again, officials took liberties with what was considered ‘slavery,’ often portraying African slavery as more benign or normalized than ‘European’ slavery. The Great Depression in the 1930s highlighted the extent to which slavery had continued under colonial rule in the interior. Moreover, according to Martin Klein and Richard Roberts, pawning and female pawning in particular increased in the interior as people became increasingly less and less able to provide food for their families. As Klein and Roberts put it, “people became the only possible form of security.”

Again, this was exacerbated by the cash crop agriculture of West Africa where women’s agricultural labour increased and male control over women’s labour translated into increased vulnerability to capture, pawning and enslavement, especially when women had no access to land. By 1930, it was clear to officials in West Africa that the two issues had to be disentangled, if only on paper, lest anti-slavery activists...

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97 Enclosure No. 1 in despatch, S.L. No. 232, 7 May 1930, Report by the Commissioner, Northern Province, A.H. Stocks, to the Honourable Colonial Secretary, 6 May 1930, Native Women and Children Customs Affecting, West Africa. 1930. Sub-File II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

98 J. C. de Graft Johnson, Asst. Secretary for Native Affairs, Accra 18 October 1927, Domestic Slavery, in NAGT 8/2/204


100 Klein and Roberts. “The Resurgence of Pawning in French West Africa During the Depression of the 1930s,” 305.

continue to see women as occupying “something of a demarcation line between human and animal.”

One outcome of the questionnaire was that officials in West Africa decided to create separate files for issues related to women where there had been none before. The creation of separate files worked to separate questions about women from questions about slavery. If justification for colonial occupation was at first about restoring an imagined order pre-dating the Atlantic slave trade, with indirect rule it became also about upholding the myth of West Africa as a communal, commodity producing peasantry. The uncomfortable truth, of course, was that this myth relied squarely upon forced labour, slavery or simply termed ‘un-free’ labour. Officials faced severe difficulties implementing taxation of which the Hut Tax War of 1898 is but one example. Without revenue from taxes, officials relied on the chiefs they had either supported or invented out of ‘big men’ to ensure a steady flow of labour through recruitment or forced rounding-up. Since the notion of ‘private’ anything – capital, investment or land – was looked upon with suspicion, attitudes toward wage-labour were also ambiguous. In the


103 This implied that women’s issues were usually filed under questions of slavery and ‘status’ is further inferred to be that of inferior, within this context.

104 This uneasy reliance on un-free labour helped to shape a mythology central to the West Africa Policy: a region of communal, peasant and subsistence producers in which officials would privilege communal land tenure over private and family labour over wage. Indeed, the very adoption of such a Policy focussed on communal land and peasantry was spurred by earlier difficulties in Kenya stemming from uncontrolled privatization of land. In Kenya, where settlers appropriated land from the Kikuyu to form the ‘White Highlands’, land privatization caused significant tension between Kikuyu farmers – who then became ‘squatters’ – and white, European farmers. Officials in West Africa sought to avoid this instability by adopting the tenents of Henry George, whose followers – ‘single taxers’ – rejected landlordism. As an integral part of the West Africa Policy, land was, in theory, to be communal and privatization rejected.
interior regions in particular, this focus on communal production coupled with a fear of encouraging wage-labour meant working with various forms of dependency, including slavery. Inconvenient as it was, slavery as mode of production had become an important reality for the West Africa Policy officials fought so tenaciously to protect.¹⁰⁵

The importance of slavery and other forms of dependency to West Africa’s colonial economies led Paul Lovejoy to characterize its abolition under colonial rule as gradualist, or a ‘slow death.’¹⁰⁶ But what is important to note here, given the connections between slavery and women, is that this gradualist metaphor of ‘dying out’ naturally extended beyond slavery. Slavery’s so-called slow death was symptomatic of broader gradualist currents in West Africa policy and it seems the gradualist handling of slavery influenced the ways with which other undesirable practices were dealt. When faced with the questionnaire asking about female circumcision practices, their forms, prevalence and locations, Governors unanimously rejected any notion of legislative action, asserting that practices should be allowed to die-out gradually as an inevitable result of a measured progression toward development. The direct references to female circumcision ‘dying out’ indicate how Atholl’s questionnaire marked a pivotal moment where officials began sorting out not only how women and women’s welfare would factor into the region’s policy, but also the continued existence of slavery in the West African interior. The

Anne Phillips has shown, this Policy earned West Africa a reputation for political and economic stability and officials sought to retain this reputation at all costs. The result, Phillips argues, was the colonial creation of a commodity producing peasantry on a scale that did not exist before in West Africa, A. Phillips, 59-84.

¹⁰⁵ A. Phillips, 26-51.

important question was how to go about these matters without upsetting the careful political and economic image they had crafted for the region as a ‘beacon of stability’ in colonial Africa.

2.3 Women, gender and initiation

One important way officials sought to ensure the gradual dying-out of female circumcision was to emphasize the importance of initiation in holding together tribal categories and native authority in West African societies. Female circumcision should be allowed to die-out naturally since, they argued, practices were not only less harmful than the east African forms but also, “beneficial to the West African societies in which they are practiced”. The precise benefits of initiation in West Africa are exemplified in K.L. Little’s 1948 description of the Sande society in *The Changing Position of Women in the Sierra Leone Protectorate*.

The initiate is instructed as to her attitude towards her husband, other men, and her fellow wives. Various forms of dancing, singing, and drumming are also taught. The Sande period of training varies from the merest formality of a few days, in the case of girls attending school, to some three months. Some girls, who have been initiated at an early age, return later to complete their ‘graduation’. The Sande girl wears two head-ties knotted at the corners round her waist, and a cross-belt and shoulder-straips of rubber and glass beads over her body which, otherwise, is uncovered. After her first experience of sexual intercourse, she puts on a cloth instead of the head-ties. The question often comes up in court in connexion with bridewealth cases: ‘Are you the first man to had [sic] intercourse with this woman?’ in the idiomatic form this is: ‘Did you tie the cloth of this woman?’ Intercourse must not take place until some time after the girls [sic] first menstruation and until

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107 A. Bevir, September 22, 1930, *Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II*, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
she has been ‘pulled’ finally from Sande. If her husband
breaks this rule, he may be held guilty of ‘woman damage’
by the girl’s parents, and risks the loss of any money he has
already paid on her account. He must also pay a fine to the
Sande society and be ‘washed’ by them, along with the
girl.\textsuperscript{108}

Here, initiation is illustrated as serving numerous functions within society not least of
which are the regulation of age-relations, sexuality and marriage. The transition from
girlhood to womanhood here is embodied in Sande and displayed through the physical
tying of the cloth around the woman’s waist serving to mark her sexual and reproductive
status. These sorts of markers assist in the regulation and maintenance of societal order
that officials were so keen to foster, but most importantly, in regulating this transition the
Sande society and initiation societies similar to it, were educative. It was this patriarchal,
communal aspect of indigenous education that so appealed to officials in West Africa and
led them to worry about what would happen if these societies ceased to exist. “If the
female practices were abolished”, wrote the Gold Coast Governor, “there would be
nothing to take their place to teach girls motherhood and how to be virtuous.”\textsuperscript{109} Here, it
is implicit that if initiation societies were interfered with, tribal regulation of age-relations
and education would be lost and there would be an obligation to expand female
education. On this front, officials had battled with Miss E.S. Fegan’s report on the
education of women in West Africa which called for further expansion which they


\textsuperscript{109} Gold Coast to Lord Passfield, 23 July, 1930, \textit{Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
viewed as precipitous. In the interior in particular, officials believed, there was no great demand for its introduction from the Chiefs and people. Moreover, they pointed to the unpopularity of the notion with parents whose perspectives W.D. Bowden describes as conservative: “once girls have been educated there is nothing for them to do but drift off to the towns and so become lost to the tribe.”

This hesitancy in expanding female education was directly related to anxieties concerning the ‘corruptive,’ detribalizing results of male education already existent in the southern, coastal areas in the 1930s. Along the coast and in cities, there existed a surplus of underemployed or unemployed educated males. This demographic worked to foster a climate of protest indicative of emergent nationalism and exacerbated the image of the city as quintessentially male. But more to the point, even without the expansion

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110 Report by Miss E.S. Fegan on the Education of Women in West Africa, TNA U.K., CO 554/84/18. Fegan’s report was sponsored by the Gilchrist Trustees and eventually abridged and submitted to the Advisory Committee on Education for circulation. Fegan travelled to all four West African colonies between August 1928 and April 1929. In her report, she was sensitive to the departments’ concerns about moving too quickly, especially the question of how to “avoid destroying what should be kept when one comes to the education of women”. But, a significant portion of her report is struck out by the Colonial Office. In this censored section, she posed an alarming question: “Yet it is easy enough to say that we do not want to alter the lives of the people too much, but rather to aim at conserving all that is good in their own ways, but how far is this going to be feasible with all our twentieth century civilization pouring in upon them with increasing rapidity as transport, and so movement, becomes more easy; and if it should be impossible, what are we going to do?”

111 Governor of Sierra Leone to Colonial Office, 17 May 1930, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

112 Enclosure II in despatch, Sierra Leone, No. 232. 17 May, 1930. Commissioner of Central Province, W.D. Bowden to the Colonial Secretary, 25 April, 1930, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

113 Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

of female education, women were already increasingly migrating to urban centres only to be ‘lost to the tribe’ through vagrancy and prostitution. Prostitution, of course, was also cited in Atholl’s questionnaire and officials seized upon this aspect as a way to further establish the case for the ‘benefits’ of initiation, pointing out that initiation regulated women’s sexuality and reproduction and “government refusal to recognize them [initiation societies] had resulted in lowering the standard of morality among young women” in Sierra Leone.115

These references to women, gender and tribal identity are important because aside from a conduit for education, initiation societies were also integral to how official’s viewed tribal identity and belonging in West Africa. With increasing fears of detribalization, tribal belonging and the methods by which belonging was ascribed became increasingly important. ‘Detribalization’ – the perceived result of the modern cash economy and western education divorcing ‘the native’ from ‘his’ tribal and village ties – was the quintessential colonial bogey-man of the 1930s. It came out of the above mentioned fears that male migrant laborers and coastal educated white-collar males were now estranged from their villages and tribal identities. Suddenly, young men and women in their migration to burgeoning cities were throwing off the yoke of their elders and as males accumulated capital in the colonial economy they also gained independence over their own marriage arrangements. While before men in north-eastern Ghana would depend upon male elders to acquire the cattle necessary to marry, with the new cash


115 Gold Coast to Lord Passfield, 23 July, 1930, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
economy young men had the resources to decide these arrangements on their own. Since indirect rule depended entirely on the native authorities who were male elders cultivated by officials, the undercutting of pre-existing gendered age-relations severely threatened both the legitimacy and functioning of the indirect-rule administrative system. Thus, confirming one’s membership of a tribal group was a natural and above all gradual indigenous solution to stemming the tide of detribalization. As the Governor of Nigeria explained of the benefits of male initiation to colonial rule:

Politically the boy is admitted to membership of the tribe, socially he is permanently attached to his circumcision group, while religiously he is as it were regenerated and affiliated with the tribal ancestor or the tutelary genius. The general effect of the rites is of course to strengthen the power of the old men, enforce observance of the native code of morals and divide society into well recognized groups, which are large or small according to the length of the intervals between the ceremonies.  

In practice, this meant that in areas where Africans were believed to have not yet been detribalized, officials worked to protect existing institutions. Of particular reference was the Bundo society in Sierra Leone, which officials considered extremely important in regulating age and gender relations.  

Emphasis was on supporting the societies while this respect remained and initiation was still voluntary, as the Commissioner of the Central Province, W.D. Bowden noted:

116 Deputy to the Governor of Nigeria to Colonial Office, July 30, 1930, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

117 Enclosure No. 1 in despatch, S.L. No. 232, 7 May 1930. Report by the Commissioner, Northern Province, A.H. Stocks, to the Honourable Colonial Secretary, 6 May 1930, Native Women and Children Customs Affecting, West Africa, 1930 Sub-File II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067
[They] don’t try to evade the rites but look forward to them and voluntarily seek initiation, especially with those who have a well-developed sense of what membership in the tribe stands for. Full membership in the tribe cannot be enjoyed except by initiation and if the tribal organization is to be continued and strengthened these same ceremonies…must continue or be replaced by some other which will equally capture the native mind.\(^{118}\)

The question of precisely what would ‘equally capture the native mind’ highlights the racialized ways officials viewed West Africans. To them, the native mind was invested \textit{a priori} within a primitive cosmology of communal agricultural production.

Divorcing the individual from his or her tribe (detribalization) encouraged urban living, alienation from rural agriculture and above all, individualization. This individualization, believed to be fostered through western education, threatened a West Africa built on the myth of communalism and peasant agriculture. By linking initiation to tribal organization, Bowden’s statement highlighted the extent to which initiation formed an important part of native authority and indirect rule. To dismantle one would be tantamount to undercutting the entire system. By this same logic, initiation societies held the potential to reverse existing detribalization and waywardness and restore age and gender relations to their imagined pre-slave trade order. Put simply, they were a traditional solution to a wide swathe of existing problems and it is why one official referred to tackling female circumcision at the expense of these other, more pressing problems.

\(^{118}\) Enclosure II in despatch, Sierra Leone, No. 232. 17 May, 1930. Commissioner of Central Province, W.D. Bowden to the Colonial Secretary, 25 April, 1930, \textit{Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
issues as “straining at the gnat and swallowing the camel.” Rather than undermine existing institutions useful for control of young women and men, officials encouraged the spread of circumcision through ‘Fulania’ to Hausa operators and onward to West Africa.

2.4 Initiation and female circumcision in colonial imagination

Officials tried to disentangle slavery from women and also isolate female circumcision from initiation. They did this in their responses by pointing to the procedure as having ancient Arab origins. Atholl had asked specifically in her questionnaire about the origins of female circumcision practices and officials took this opportunity to discuss its practice among ‘animists’ and Christians, but also to highlight its genealogical ties with the Arab world and Islam. While in Nigeria the practice seemed to be dying-out among educated Christians, among Muslims and those who were “superstitious”, it continued and pointing to Islam as the source of such knowledge meant the practices were a product of nineteenth century Islamic and specifically Fulani expansion. The jihads are important to note since officials persistently feared Mahdist threats from Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and throughout West Africa. Any association between female circumcision and the expansion of Islam was therefore delicate.

119 Enclosure No. IV. Deputy Director of Health Services, W. H. Peacock, to the Honourable Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, Native Women and Children Customs Affecting, West Africa. 1930. Sub-File II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067

120 Officials believed in a racialized difference between those considered Hausa and Fulani and this belief influenced indirect rule policy regarding indigenous leaders and ‘tradition’. In reality scholars have shown ethnicity here was far more fluid than colonial archives claim, but this belief of officials that a segment of the population ruled over others was very much impacted by what they believed to be ‘traditional’ Islamic institutions. Again, much of this had to do with Britain’s fears of a Mahdist revolt coming out of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and extending westward but also the possibility of independent revolts occurring within the West African interior. In the Sokoto Caliphate, these fears were pronounced and officials trod carefully regarding issues they felt could incite rebellion or unrest.
Interested in the apparent spread of female circumcision among the Yoruba, the Nigeria department conducted a study enclosed in the dispatch by a pre-eminent West African doctor, Dr. Oguntola Sapara. Dr. Sapara was an official who cited knowledge of the procedure as coming “from the Arabs through Fulania.”\footnote{Enclosure No. 793 in Nigeria dispatch, Dr. Oguntola Sapara to Acting Deputy Director of Health Services at Lagos, July 30, 1930 Lagos 19, May, 1930, \textit{Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1} He found that clitoridectomy (referred to in Yoruba as \textit{ige-abe} - literally the cutting of the private part) was performed among the Yoruba primarily by Hausa operators. This surprised Sapara, as he had believed medicine men would be the vehicles of this knowledge. However, he found eighty percent of operators to be Hausa.\footnote{Ibid. Sapara was a physician and researcher with the Colonial Medical Service in West Africa. Born as Alexander Williams in Sierra Leone to a father who was a liberated slave from Ilesha in western Nigeria and a mother from Egbaland, he like many 19th century elite West Africans chose to ‘Africanize’ his name, and chose Oguntola Sapara. After completing his education in England at St. Thomas’s Hospital Medical School in 1888 (where he received honours in midwifery), he went on to Scotland and obtained the LRCP and LRCS of Edinburgh, the LFPS of Glasgow and Fellow of the Royal Institute of Health. To practice, he returned to Lagos and was appointed an Assistant Colonial Surgeon in the medical department of Lagos colony until his retirement in 1928. By the time of his death in 1935, Sapara had become one of the most famous physicians in nineteenth and early 20th century West Africa, receiving an appointment in 1923 to the Companionship of the Imperial Service Order, Honorary Consulting Physician to the Egba Native Administration, and recognition from the Owa (paramount ruler) of Ijeshaland with the insignia of Bashemi, a chieftaincy title.} In locating the operators as Hausa, Sapara effectively pointed to a link between clitoridectomy and Islam. This link did not in any way preclude the practice as an initiation rite, but rather pointed to its adoption among groups that may not have practiced it before. His reference to the religious aspects of the procedure is not surprising given his professional background. A specialist in midwifery, Dr. Sapara had made a name for himself in the Colonial Medical Service through his work in infectious diseases. One of his most notable achievements was the...
spearheading of a campaign for the eradication of smallpox in southern Nigeria.\textsuperscript{123} Focussing on the town of Epe, he infiltrated a local cult led by small-pox priests, facilitating its breakdown through the vaccination of inhabitants which led to the eventual immunity of the entire town against the disease. His actions were quickly taken up by officials, leading to the ‘Witchcraft and Juju Ordinance,’ making worship of smallpox punishable.\textsuperscript{124} Given the religious pluralism of the Yoruba, his approach to tackling smallpox through small-pox priests prepared him well for his study of \textit{ige-abe}: by the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Lagos Muslims had become the largest religious group in the British-administered capital and as J.D.Y. Peel points out the religious syncretism between Islam and indigenous belief systems among the Yoruba was strong.\textsuperscript{125} Rather than frame his study along medical lines, Sapara understood this and focused on the cosmological, asking “What has given rise to these ideas among Yoruba’s [sic]?”\textsuperscript{126} In referring to clitoridectomy as an ‘idea’, Sapara placed female circumcision as less a requirement of initiation than a rational choice linked to reproduction or beliefs about reproduction. Rather than link the practice directly to Islam, he attributed it to religious plurality, citing its prevalence among non-Christians and those believing in “superstitions.” Christianity, introduced as it was in the nineteenth century, was still novel among the Yoruba, whereas

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\item Ibid.
\item Enclosure No. 793 in Nigeria dispatch, July 30, 1930 Lagos 19, May, 1930. Dr. Oguntola Sapara to Acting Deputy Director of Health Services at Lagos, \textit{Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
\end{enumerate}
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in Lagos traditional religion was not entirely independent of Islam and the two in Peel’s words, had “known one another for a long time.”

Though practiced by ‘non-Christians’, Sapara’s study demonstrated the interest of officials in ‘tracking’ practices perceived as Islamic; these practices then became ‘markers’ in tracking Islam’s expansion. This sort of tracking of Islam to the south has been noted in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, where officials instituted a ‘Southern Policy’ to hinder dissemination of Arabic and Islam to the south. There as in Nigeria, female circumcision was treated as a ‘marker’ of Islamic expansion and, as Janice Boddy notes, intermarriage was forbidden so as to prevent the adoption of pharaonic circumcision that Nuba and other southern peoples had started to perform in order to secure larger dowries from their Arab neighbors. Here the superstitious element was also evident among other groups of the south. For example, Sapara noted that among the Sobo, there was a belief that if the child’s head touched the clitoris it would die. He argued that this is taken so seriously that when pregnant, Sobo women in Lagos would travel home to their families to have the operation done before they gave birth. Thus pegging Hausa operators as vehicles for the procedure’s spread southward did not preclude its practice or

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127 J.D.Y. Peel, Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba, 187.

128 Boddy, Civilizing Women, 140-142.

129 Ibid.

130 Enclosure No. 793 in Nigeria dispatch, July 30, 1930 Lagos 19, May, 1930. Dr. Oguntola Sapara to Acting Deputy Director of Health Services at Lagos, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
spread among non-Muslims. As Peel notes, Islam’s success was in part due to its “magico-spiritual techniques and its social affability.”\textsuperscript{131}

Aside from pointing to Hausa operators as vehicles for the practice’s spread, Sapara looked at why the Yoruba would be so receptive to adopting the practices in the first place.\textsuperscript{132} Rather than place the practice within the parameters of initiation or age-relations, Sapara explained the Yoruba’s great love of children as inciting their adoption of clitoridectomy. In this way, the practice is placed within the religio-pluralist realm of “reproductive cosmologies,” a term that I believe captures the motivations Sapara illustrates: how the female circumcision was viewed as somehow aiding reproduction. Focusing on the practice’s adoption among the Yoruba as linked to beliefs about reproduction fit well within the broader departmental rhetoric because it played-upon officials’ beliefs that African women would not take any measures that could endanger their reproduction or increase infant mortality. As the Governor of Gambia remarked, since reproduction was simply the \textit{raison d’etre} of these people it is unlikely they would do something that would impede bearing children.\textsuperscript{133} This ties into officials’ presumptions of what ‘captured’ the native mind. And it is this emphasis on women’s choices as somehow naturally and singularly guided by reproduction that is problematic.

\textsuperscript{131} Peel, 214.

\textsuperscript{132} It was his position at the vanguard of a government campaign in early 20th century to reduce infant mortality in Lagos that led him to organize a society to encourage scientific training of African midwives and stimulate interest of Nigerian girls in midwifery and in this sense he was well-position to provide comment on both midwifery training suggestions and the nature of clitoridectomy in Lagos.

\textsuperscript{133} Acting Governor of the Gambia, CRM Northman, 26 July, 1930, \textit{Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
Viewing having children as the singular goal of African women in life exemplifies the male colonial bias of the archives mentioned by Cooper, Musisi and others.

As a West African physician, Dr. Sapara’s report lent an authoritative voice to the departmental responses and however attentive to the religious pluralism of the practices his opinion remained very much in line with that of his white, male colonial counterparts. As Robert W. July noted of Sapara’s career in the Colonial Medical Service, Sapara believed “there was no point in hindering British efforts and heckling officials.”134 Far from a rabble-rouser, Sapara believed that progress would only be achieved “through a mastery of western science, not through appeals to African nationalism.”135 His report was an integral component of a policy set upon discouraging detribalization and individualism in favour of a conservative communalism based on colonial conceptions of tradition in West Africa.136 But viewing the adoption of circumcision in reproductive terms also fits within the gradualist aims of officials regarding its abolishment. Linking the practices to Islam and reproduction in much the same way that officials did in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan constructed the practices as foreign introductions to existing non-Muslim initiation societies. It worked to protect the initiation societies from criticism and give credence to officials’ argument that over time gradually the practice would die-out naturally from within.

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135 Ibid.

136 This was not all part of a colonial logic. Sapara himself took a very keen interest in West African traditional medicine and reserved a deep respect for certain Yoruba traditions and institutions.
Linking the practices to Islam and reproduction – reproductive cosmologies – much in the same way that officials did in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan allowed officials to entertain suggestions of education programmes implemented there. Similar to officials in Anglo-Egypt, officials in Nigeria shared a concern that female circumcision accounted for low birthrates, high levels of infant maternal mortality and therefore shortages of labour. \textsuperscript{137} Atholl’s questionnaire asked specifically about hospitals, midwives and infant welfare as well as education and in addressing these areas the Nigerian department incited a discussion regarding the training of a class of illiterate women in the North “along the lines of the Arab illiterates of Miss Wolff’s School of Midwifery at Omdurman.”\textsuperscript{138}

The midwifery training program proposal for Northern Nigeria could be viewed as part of official’s efforts to restore female circumcision to its ancient form. Earlier in 1926, the topic of female circumcision was discussed at the Conference of East African Governors and it was decided that since the practice was of “ancient origin,” that those practicing the more brutal forms should, with official persuasion, “return to the more ancient and less brutal form.”\textsuperscript{139} The statement was tempered with a reminder to act gradually, but in working toward persuading people back to ancient, less severe forms,

\textsuperscript{137} Boddy, 5.

\textsuperscript{138} Governor of Nigeria, 30 July, 1930, \textit{Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
Passfield did suggest officials consider training operators with proper skill if it would not hinder gradualist policy.\(^{140}\)

In West Africa, it seems officials believed the more severe practices to be deviations from an ancient form which was closer in resemblance and severity to male circumcision. Curbing this deviation was thus part of larger official efforts to restore West Africa to its imagined pre-slave trade order, but in the site of the proposed midwifery training school - the Sokoto Caliphate - this aim was certainly racialized. The plan was therefore not only about reducing harm and increasing sanitation, but also the desire of officials to re-set racial taxonomies disrupted through slavery. Since Atholl’s questionnaire speaks directly to the question of maternity work; the notion of training midwives to be the ‘change from within’ provided a plausible way to demonstrate officials were doing something and allow them to also monitor and control the practices gradually without legislation.

The education of illiterate midwives was meant to provide a bridge toward the custom’s impending natural death but importantly, the idea was liked because it was a solution which officials felt would not be regarded as signifying Government approval of excision but could work to persuade women to stop.\(^{141}\) Moreover, the Wolff program in Sudan had been implemented without backlash or sparking of cultural nationalism. Despite these arguments in favour of the plan, the ‘path of least resistance’ logic

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\(^{140}\) Ibid.

\(^{141}\) Enclosure No. 1 in despatch, S.L. No. 232, 7 May 1930. Report by the Commissioner, Northern Province, A.H. Stocks, to the Honourable Colonial Secretary, 6 May 1930, Native Women and Children Customs Affecting, West Africa. 1930. Sub-File II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067. They were mostly concerned with ulceration and sepsis, which a surgeon or trained operator could rectify.
prevailed. Here, Governors again invoked concerns regarding female education. The Sierra Leone Governor cited the example of previous efforts in Freetown to start a midwifery department; the experiment failed, as the trainees left before being qualified and Health Services believed that Africans would “have nothing to do with them [the Protectorate midwives].”\textsuperscript{142} The Governor of Nigeria had not intended in his suggestion to allow the illiterate, northern \textit{dayas} to practice midwifery throughout the colony; they were to be registered to practice in circumscribed areas only. This is differed from the literate midwives, who were allowed to practice anywhere in Nigeria after completion of the course. The suggestion that the Northern Provinces establish a “Native administered maternity service of illiterate women” was ultimately dismissed.\textsuperscript{143}

Apart from fears regarding female education in general, the Sierra Leone Medical and Sanitary Services voiced concerns about whether such a program would demonstrate support for the practice and hinder its natural death. “Any measure short of absolute prohibition which would be useless, would imply at least partial recognition of the practice, and militate against its eventual abolition.”\textsuperscript{144} Again, arguing against hasty action, the Sierra Leone Governor suggested “the remedy must come from within,

\textsuperscript{142} Enclosure No. IV. Deputy Director of Health Services, W. H. Peacock, to the Honourable Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, \textit{Native Women and Children Customs Affecting, West Africa. 1930. Sub-File II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067

\textsuperscript{143} Nigeria response, \textit{Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II}. TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

\textsuperscript{144} Enclosure No. III in despatch, Sierra Leone. No. 232. 17 May 1930. Director of Medical and Sanitary Services J.C. S. McDougall to the Honourable Colonial Secretary, 17 April 1930, \textit{Native Women and Children Customs Affecting, West Africa. 1930. Sub-File II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067
stimulated by education and by contact with civilization.” Further, the Acting Director of the Medical and Sanitary Service was concerned about the precedent such a program would set. He explained that since the more severe form did not exist anywhere in the Gold Coast (and since there was no mutilation or deformity) he was not in favor of the plan. “I am not in favor of training native women to perform it with proper skill and precaution as to attempt to do so would be construed to mean that Government sanctioned and in fact favored its continuance.” Ultimately, the suggestion of the Wolff program did not seem to come to fruition as it was thought it would provoke unrest. As the Governor of Nigeria cautioned, “Any attempt to accelerate by repressive measures a change in social conditions might precipitate an outbreak or lead to a sudden breakdown of moral barriers.”

Here, officials’ concerns again came down to female education and women’s mobility - two issues important to gradualist policy in the region. Sanctioning, or somehow explicitly demonstrating support for or maintenance of the practices could bring further interest, publicity, and unrest. Most importantly, it would go against the gradualist reform or natural ‘dying-out’ officials sought to achieve. This is not altogether unfounded. Yet, it is telling how ‘sanction’ can be defined two ways: as a noun, it means a threatened penalty for disobeying a law or rule. Yet, as a verb, it means to give official

145 Governor of Sierra Leone to Colonial Office, 17 May 1930, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

146 Gold Coast dispatch, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

147 Governor of Nigeria, 30 July, 1930, Native Women and Children – Customs Affecting West Africa Sub-file II, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1
permission or approval. Clearly, the Gold Coast Governor was referring to the latter, but the consensus, in practice, meant both. While administrators did not want to lend official approval to the practice (something they thought the Nigerian plan seemingly encouraged) they also did not want to legislate against it or bring it under the rule of law, or in Sean Hawkins’ term, ‘the world on paper.’

2.5 Women’s Status in West Africa: Colonial Policy and Consensus

Atholl concluded the questionnaire asking whether legislation, education or financial assistance could be used to raise the status of women. With financial assistance out of the question in 1930 the only other options to be addressed were legislation and education. Education was a viable option for Governors in West Africa, but as we have seen, even then education would be relegated to manipulating existing institutions to which initiation involving circumcision was central. While education along the lines of midwifery training instituted in Sudan at first seemed a viable option, officials remained hesitant as to how such a program would be received and whether it would lead to increased detribalization and estrangement from the rural interior. Legislation, of course, was vehemently rejected from the very start. The entire set of departmental responses support Anne Philp’s thesis that West African officials hesitated to implement measures believed to be precipitous. More to the point, legislation would tie the colonial government to enforcement, a prospect officials believed was impossible due to lack of funds, personnel and male access to women.

Unfortunately, this narrative of the departmental responses – like many aspects of colonial policy in West Africa – was not so tidy. Following the sending of the departmental responses to Passfield for editing, approval and eventual publication, the Gold Coast Governor uncovered additional information related to the status of women in the colony’s Northern Territories and decided to prepare a second, corrected response for the Colonial Office. Governor Slater had been viewed by the Colonial Office as excessively paternalistic, but this was a tendency the Colonial Office attributed more broadly to the Gold Coast government vis-à-vis its regional counterparts. In the corrected response, however, Governor Slater incorporated recent research conducted by the Gold Coast’s first government anthropologist, R.S. Rattray. Previously, Rattray had served as a district official and after completing formal training in anthropology he conducted research in Asante and by 1928 began his ethnographic fieldwork in the Northern Territories. Having studied the matrilineal Akan in the 1920s, Rattray became fascinated with the origins of lineage structures in African societies. Moreover, he took an interest in Northerners’ customs and practices, particularly those tied to initiation. While in the North, he was present at a female circumcision operation and after conducting background research on the topic, Rattray sent his findings to Slater. In Rattray’s opinion, female circumcision was not only present in the Northern Territories, but government legislation would be welcomed by those groups who practiced cutting. Armed with this new information from a trained anthropologist Slater prepared to amend his original response that female circumcision did not exist in the Gold Coast.149

149 To be fair, this statement was based on the coast colony and Asante but this new information on the Northern Territories did very much alter how the Gold Coast government viewed these practices within its borders.
I have no reason to doubt the correctness of that statement as regards the Colony and Ashanti but I have recently been informed by Captain Rattray (who spent his last tour in the Northern Territories) that the practice of “female circumcision” is widely prevalent in the Protectorate, and is necessarily, when deferred til the age of puberty (as if often the case), the cause of intense suffering to the girl. Captain Rattray considers that the tribes generally would welcome a pronouncement from Government that this practice must cease. I am asking the Acting Governor to call for an early report on the whole matter from the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories and the Director of Medical and Sanitary Services and, if they see no objection, to institute propaganda accordingly. If necessary legislation will also be passed.\textsuperscript{150}

Before the Colonial Office could properly react, Slater had presented Rattray’s information while on furlough in London to the All-Party Committee of Members of Parliament for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Colonies, which included Rathbone and Atholl. The Colonial Office could do little more than doctor the response for Command Paper publication. In an effort to avoid the publicity the entire West Africa file sought to discourage, the Colonial Office gently asked the Governor to revise since his commentary on female circumcision in the Northern Territories “could not very well be printed.”

…any qualification we might print of the Gold Coast despatch might tend to discredit the accuracy of the statements in the other despatches in the eyes of the ladies and gentlemen interested in certain aspects of this subject which might cause further enquiries into a matter which should now have been satisfactorily ventilated.\textsuperscript{151}


\textsuperscript{151} Minutes. A. Bevir. September 22, 1930, \textit{Native Women & Children – Customs Affecting West Africa. Sub File II}, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/
Beyond editing the Gold Coast response, the Colonial office also pointed to the preliminary nature of Rattray’s claims noting they were yet unproved. The reality was that amidst the bevy of constructed colonial moral crises – gender chaos, wayward women, detribalized males – colonial knowledge production began to change. Though Lugard may have referred to anthropologists as ‘sociologists,’ the discipline of anthropology had begun to flourish and with new training through its leaders such as Malinowski, British social anthropology would become an important, though often disputed, tool in ordering Empire. The rise of British social anthropology and its interests in functionalism would ensure that far from ‘dying-out’ questions of custom affecting the status of women would continue to disrupt the “interplay between private pressures and public disorder” in West Africa policy.\textsuperscript{152}

\textbf{2.6 Conclusion}

In constructing female circumcision as originating in the Arab world, administrators sought to portray the practices as a relatively recent nineteenth century introduction to West Africa. Despite the reality that numerous Christian, traditional and Muslim groups performed the procedure as an initiation rite, this focus on chronology made the notion of legislation look especially hasty. Moreover, focusing on the foreignness of these ancient practices made them seem fluid and changeable and dislocated them from initiation societies. West African officials sought desperately to retain initiation societies as their gerontocratic structures supported instruments of indirect rule. Arguably, protecting and maintaining female initiation societies was the

\textsuperscript{152} A. Phillips, 159.
most important goal for officials because while authorities ruled rather centrally through Muslim leaders in the Sokoto Caliphate and similarly stratified polities, they continued to endure rebellions, protests and resistance from outlying areas. These decentralized peoples were often viewed as neither Muslim nor Christian, but often practiced a mixture of traditional religion and Islam as well as various “superstitions” as pointed out by Dr. Sapara. These decentralized and often religiously pluralistic regions were important to pacify and control and buttressing native authorities and supporting institutions was integral to indirect rule. As a seemingly primordial practice, initiation was an important tool for furthering the sort of communalist, peasant agricultural development officials desired in West Africa. The Northern Territories fit this description and it is for these reasons that even Rattray’s hint at proscriptive legislation along the northern borders of the Gold Coast was ill-received. Officials finally conquered the Tong Hills, but continued to undermine its religious shrine through the first part of the twentieth century. They realized that implementing indirect rule there would be harder than initially imagined. In this way, efforts to preserve and maintain indigenous structures were actually thinly veiled attempts at controlling the very institutions officials heralded in the consensus as exemplifying women’s independence, autonomy, and power in West Africa. The desired outcome of the West African responses was to secure and defend trusteeship over women and the nature of the West Africa Policy allowed for a certain degree of ambiguity that provided for a terrain of struggle.
Chapter 3

“In ‘the cutting of women’ girls risk their lives”: R.S. Rattray and the Making of Undesirable Practices

R.S. Rattray’s stance on female circumcision practices in Northern Ghana exemplified tensions between anthropologists and colonial administrators regarding knowledge production and policy in colonial Africa. Like many early government anthropologists employed in Africa, Rattray started his career in the colonial service before formally studying ethnography. Initially studying Chinyanja folklore in Central Africa he applied this interest to West Africa where in 1913 he published Hausa Folklore. Later, he took up a position as government anthropologist at the Asante Anthropological Institute in 1923. While at the Institute, he utilized theoretical training in anthropology acquired during time spent at Oxford (1909-1911) with his mentor, R.R. Marett. Marett was a classical evolutionist and having followed in the footsteps of E.B. Tylor, he had come to lead one of the most important schools of working anthropologists. Among Rattray’s

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154 Rattray served in the Boer war after which time he entered the colonial service as a customs officer. Later, he served as district commissioner in Togoland and following WWI, Assistant Colonial Secretary to the Legislative Council of the Gold Coast. He was trained in law, as well.

colleagues was C.K. Meek. Meek’s focus was also West Africa. He first worked as a government anthropologist in Northern Nigeria, but with the Women’s War of 1929, he was sent to south-eastern Nigeria to conduct fieldwork and investigate the reason for the disturbances. Rattray and Meek worked for the government through the 1920s to produce ethnographic work for the better maintenance of indirect rule in Nigeria and the Gold Coast. Their work during this period has been described by George W. Stocking as classically evolutionist.156 However by the time Rattray completed his Northern research in 1930, the evolutionist approach within anthropological circles had already fallen into disuse. Though Rattray’s approach throughout his career followed that of a classical evolutionist his stance on female circumcision and the role of chiefs in Northern Ghana countered officials’ vision for development in the region. The tensions between Rattray and officials about the path ‘indirect rule’ would take in the North is discussed by Carola Lentz, Jean Allman and John Parker, and Jeff Grischow.157 But precisely how ‘undesirable practices’ were shaped by disagreements between anthropologist and the colonial state has yet to be addressed.

This chapter focusses on the period following Rattray’s fieldwork as a government commissioned anthropologist – beginning in 1928 and ending in 1930 – in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. In particular, it explores the context for his position on female circumcision, and locates his resulting conflict with the Colonial Office as exemplary of the tensions Jack Goody and Sally Falk Moore point to between

anthropologists and officials in colonial Africa.\textsuperscript{158} Rattray’s views on native authority reform implied abrupt change to native authority structures in Northern Ghana. Female circumcision was not the sole issue that led Rattray to be labelled an outsider by colonial officials. His opinions on earth-priests as custodians of land and natural native authorities in the north-east have been remarked on by scholars as a cause for concern among administrators.\textsuperscript{159} Though his contentious stance on these two issues points to a transformation in Rattray’s position as a classical evolutionist, my focus here is female circumcision, its’ shaping by Rattray as an undesirable practice, and the tensions resulting from his stance.\textsuperscript{160}

Rattray’s opinion on female circumcision was viewed by officials as especially dangerous because it implied a privileging of individual rights over collective or community rights. This is part of what Benjamin Talton has described as Rattray’s rebuke of officials’ preference for ‘tribes’ as the basis for political structures.\textsuperscript{161} Put simply, they disagreed over what ‘tribes’ meant – in composition, political structure and as the basis for native authority. This not only compromised officials’ visions for community development and gradual reform in the Northern Territories, but also the slow, natural

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item I am also concerned with illustrating the context surrounding this disagreement, a task which means I must later in this chapter make mention of his colleague Meek’s notes on circumcision in Nigeria. This is because Meek’s work on circumcision was quite aligned with the opinions of officials in the previous chapter and in this way further illustrates the tenuous nature of Rattray’s stance.
\end{enumerate}
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death officials had hoped for female circumcision and other undesirable practices in the West African interior. In disagreeing with the Colonial Office, Rattray’s professional opinion clashed with policy-makers’ position on women and also transgressed the implied co-operation of anthropologists employed by the colonial service in Africa.\textsuperscript{162}

3.1 The Northern Territories in Colonial Imagination

Rattray’s work in the Northern Territories began in 1928 when he travelled to the capital of the North, Tamale, to conduct ethnographic work in what was then commonly referred to as the Ashanti hinterland. George Ekem Ferguson, a Fanti official for the Gold Coast, had travelled to the North in the late 1890s and recorded much about the major ethnic groups of the region. It was a mission aimed at brokering treaties with groups inhabiting the frontiers of German and French incursion.\textsuperscript{163} The treaties worked to help secure the northern borders of what would become the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. Prior to Ferguson’s travels, officials hesitated committing to definite boundaries. Raymond Bening notes that it was Britain’s interest in safeguarding caravan trade routes that ran through Salaga that compelled officials to finally set the Gold Coast-Togo boundary from the south as far as the Volta Rivers, leading to the creation of what was called the Anglo-French ‘Neutral Zone’ between 1884 and 1888.\textsuperscript{164} The neutral zone encompassed important trading towns in the North such as Salaga, Bimbila, Yendi, Tamale and Gushiegu. Similarly, in the west, the Gold Coast-Cote d’Ivoire boundary was

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{162}] Goody, 7
\item[\textsuperscript{164}] Raymond Bagulo Bening, \textit{Ghana Regional Boundaries and National Integration} (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1999), 17
\end{itemize}
set in 1891 from the south to the 9th latitude. Though by 1891 these eastern and western boundaries were set, Britain’s sphere of influence in Asante was not yet formalized. This quickly changed in 1896 when British troops occupied Asante and declared Kumasi the seat of government there. Wars ensued between the British and Asante, but following the defeat of Asante in 1900 the British turned their attention to permanently defining internal borders of the Gold Coast.
Figure 1 – Map showing borders of Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti and Northern Territories including ‘Neutral Zone’, 1989. Source: Raymond Bagulo Bening, Ghana Regional Boundaries and National Integration. Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1999, 29
Asante’s defeat effectively opened-up the northern interior beyond what was already defined through the establishment of the Neutral Zone. Up to this point, Kintampo, at 9th latitude north, served as the northern limit of official colonial presence but once the French and Germans seized Ouagadougou to the north and “Sansanne Mangu” [sic] to the north-east, respectively, the British felt compelled to secure its sphere of interest in the Gold Coast’s northern interior. Ferguson advocated the British extend their borders to guard against further incursion from the French and his papers did much to convince officials to make the north a Protectorate. At this early point, officials viewed the north as composed of stateless tribes and a few centralized states such as Gonja and Dagomba who had previously paid tribute to Asante in both slaves and goods. Unfortunately, while Europeans acknowledged Asante’s reach in the northern interior, their drawing-up of borders did not take other pre-colonial power centres into account. Paul Nugent and A.I. Asiwaju have argued that in pre-colonial times, Africans’ conception of borders was more like a raisin bun. The raisins, scattered throughout, indicated the power centres or cities such as those which made up the Sokoto Caliphate or Asante and as Igor Kopytoff notes, the power or reach of pre-colonial West African states resembled concentric circles. While the inner circles denoted higher taxes yet less threat from slave raiders, subsequent circles further outside meant fewer taxes but more lawlessness and slave raiding. The imposition of these borders to construct

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165 Bening, 26.

Northern Ghana reflected officials’ inability to understand complex and overlapping pre-colonial conduits of power in the West African interior.

W.A. Cardinall’s *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (1921) focussed more on distinguishing ethnic groups than did Ferguson, whose mandate was to persuade administrators to secure the Ashanti hinterland during the Scramble for Africa. Cardinall’s work was completed roughly a decade earlier than Rattray, and unlike him, he was not professionally trained. Despite the gap between their respective spans of fieldwork, Rattray, Cardinall, and Eyre-Smith would come to share the belief that the official view of tribes was flawed and that clans were a more suitable basis for analysis. Previous to Rattray, little ethnographic work had been done in the North and since he was commissioned in 1928 to assist in the reformation of native authority, the task set before him would have seemed nearly impossible to complete in a time span of just over a year. His solution was to work mainly on a handful of ethnic groups that he considered part of his “kaleidoscope picture” of the North: Mo, Nchumuru, Kratchi, Nanumba, Gonja, Dagomba, Konkomba, Chokosi, Bimoba, Mamprusi, Kusasi, Nabdam, Talansi, Nankanni, Kassena, Builsa, Islala, Dagati, Wala, and Lobi.

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168 Talton, 86.


170 Ibid., viii.
Figure 2 – Map from *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, Vol. 2, entitled “Tribal and Linguistic Map of the Gold Coast Colony”. The caption states: “The names within brackets, thus (BULEA), are those by which the languages are known to the tribes which speak them. They have been superimposed upon the official map published by the Survey H.Q. Accra 1927. The red line, indicating ‘AKAN AND RELATED DIALECTS’ is here reproduced as
shown on the original map, but it might now, in the light of our fuller knowledge, be extended to embrace GBANYA and CHAKOSI”.

Though Rattray provided more space to some groups than others, by the close of his fieldwork he had come to believe that the complexity of the Northerners could be understood simply by dividing them into two groups: ‘primitive’ and ‘barbaric.’ More centralized groups such as Dagomba and Mamprusi fell under the label of barbarian while groups such as Kusasi and Konkomba were primitive. The primitive tribes, he argued, had not been affected by ‘foreign’ influences and thus preserved the germ of the more developed institutions of the Akan, such as those he encountered in Asante. Conversely, the barbaric groups were characterized as foreigners who long ago descended upon the primitive peoples bringing with them Islam and patrilineality (for Rattray, primitive peoples were thought to be matrilineal). These strangers, he argued, were “warrior band offshoots from Negro kingdoms of the interior” who settled and “super-imposed a new political conception”, intermarrying, intermixing, and adopting customs along the way. The task was thus to study the primitive groups as he believed that stateless societies held the germ or origins of Asante’s “wonderful system of decentralization.” If allowed to develop naturally and along their own lines, the primitive groups would also climb the evolutionary ladder to nationhood. It was a view

171 These terms are explained later in the context of Rattray’s work in the Gold Coast.

172 What he meant here was clear-cut, sharply focused, and in full operation, customs and beliefs which in the southern state had become blurred or atrophied.

173 Rattray, Tribes, xii.

174 Ibid.
that was highly evolutionist, but it is one that would work to shape how administrators viewed the North, its people, and the implementation of indirect rule.

Rattray’s critical view of “the tribe” did not hinder him from using it tribal as a unit of analysis. Benjamin Talton has critiqued Rattray’s work among the Konkomba in what is today Ghana’s northern region. He views Rattray’s research methodology as reflecting the colonial bias toward chieftaincy, meaning that in collecting information on the Konkomba he mostly spoke with the Dagomba *nas* (chiefs). This Dagomba-centered approach overshadowed Konkomba perspectives in favour of a Dagomba narrative of first origins. Talton has shown the ways in which Rattray’s work contributed to the shaping of indirect rule and thus contemporary Konkomba – Dagomba tensions. Similarly, in her work on the north-west, Carola Lentz has portrayed Rattray as imposing an idealistic, utopian view of an “egalitarian, spiritually legitimated, democratic and decentralized society” on to the pre-colonial past. His idealism is the reason Jeff Grischow views him as furthering the “anthropological notion of African community.” This anthropological notion of community was as much about binding groups of people along tribal lines as it was about excluding or deepening antagonisms between groups under indirect rule.

In the north-east, Rattray focused much of his work on the Talensi. In the early twentieth century, official concern for the Talensi stemmed from their inhabiting of the

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175 Lentz, 97.

176 Talton, 87. See the whole of Talton’s book for a discussion of the historical basis for present-day Konkomba-Dagomba tensions in Yendi.

177 Lentz, 103.

178 Grischow, 117-118.
Tong Hills which was an important area in the colonial conquest or pacification of Northern Ghana as it was the last hold-out against colonial incursion, falling only in 1912. The Talensi were guardians of the Tongnaab shrine, one of several shrines found in the North. It was an earth shrine with a spirit medium which subverted colonial power by attracting far-reaching networks of pilgrims stretching from the north-east to southern Ghana. The shrine’s importance ensured that despite officials’ attempts to close the shrine, it remained open. For twentieth century anthropologists, the Talensi were a fascination and following Rattray, Meyer Fortes would go on to study the area in greater detail. For Rattray especially, this group, the phenomenon of ‘earth-priests,’ and the north-east more generally seemed exemplary of ‘traditional,’ primitive Ashanti hinterland. Rattray’s preoccupation with what seemed to be traditional or primitive elements has led John Parker and Jean Allman to point to Rattray’s ethnographic work as central to the ‘making’ of Tongnaab. Rattray’s journey to the North in search of the primitive, McCaskie described as ‘quixotic’:

His geographical flight--ever northward into the Ghanaian hinterland - was, in terms of intellect and emotion, an odyssey, a quixotic pursuit of essential first causes in history and social organization. Rattray was, crudely, in

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179 Regrettably, this project has not the scope or focus to discuss the considerable work of Meyer Fortes. For a further discussion of his work in Northern Ghana and among the Talensi more specifically, see: Meyer Fortes, The dynamics of clanship among the Tallensi, being the first part of an analysis of the social structure of a Trans-Volta tribe. 3rd reprint (Netherlands: Anthropological Publications, 1967) and The web of kinship among the Tallensi; the second part of a analysis of the social structure of a Trans-Volta tribe. 4th reprint. First published in 1949. (Oosterhout N.B: Anthropological Publications, 1969).

180 Allman and Parker, Tongnaab: The History of a West African God.

181 Ibid.
search of the key to an essentially synchronic and immutable perfection - a first cause.\textsuperscript{182}

Not surprisingly, this fascination with an idealized primitive or pristine North influenced his research methodology. His interpreter, Victor Aboya, was from the Nankanse tribe.

As Rattray explains in *Tribes*, he chose Aboya because he was educated, yet traditional. Of course, it was necessary for anthropologists at this time to utilize African
translators and informants.\textsuperscript{183} Lyn Shumaker has noted that in the case of the Livingstone Institute in Zambia, research assistants were as important – if not vital – to the shaping of research methodologies and the Institute itself.\textsuperscript{184} However, in Rattray’s case in Northern Ghana Aboya’s voice was carefully edited. He was provided the space to record “in his own words and from an African’s point of view.”\textsuperscript{185} But, even this view was managed by Rattray who assured readers of Tribes that Aboya had given record “faithfully and without any attempt to impress us by airing or dragging in his later acquired European knowledge.”\textsuperscript{186} Though Rattray did not view tribal categories as static, it was nevertheless the tribalized African that represented the only type of ‘authentic’ Africa Rattray cared to study. Thus, Aboya, an educated Christian, was given a voice yet was simultaneously silenced when it operated outside of imagined authentic and tribalized box provided for him.\textsuperscript{187} As was often the case in colonial Africa, informants’


\textsuperscript{185} Rattray, 130. Rattray reveals that when Victor was quite young he was exchanged by his uncle for a few baskets of grain in order to keep his remaining family from starvation during a time of famine. Rattray frames this bluntly as him being ‘sold as a slave’. Eventually, he was freed and adopted by Basel missionaries who educated him and taught him to read and write. He returned to his place of birth years later, when he became acquainted with Rattray.

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid. Rattray notes that the originals, of which his following chapters are translations, were written in Nankanse.

\textsuperscript{187} Although still limited, Rattray’s inclusion of Aboy\textquotesingle{s} translated account nevertheless adds another dimension during this transitional moment in British anthropology.
contributions were en-textualized, re-contextualized, and made readable for administrators. Few were given the recognition their intellectual labors deserved. 188

Rattray’s approach to the North reflected a preoccupation with a pristine, authentic Africa, but it was a view he had brought with him from his earlier work in Asante. As McCaskie notes, while in Asante, Rattray fashioned himself as speaking to ‘everyday’ people but was nevertheless obsessed with “grey-bearded men.” 189 Despite Rattray’s qualms with administrators about indirect rule and the role of chiefs and tribes, his research methodologies focussed on the words and opinions of chiefs, elders and other prominent men, but rarely women. 190 He may have been hesitant to place ethnic groups within tribal straightjackets, but he nevertheless spent a disproportionate amount of time interviewing male elders, many of whom were invested in asserting patriarchal control over women during this period of intense social and economic change. 191 The men Rattray consulted with shape his perspective on women, gender and female circumcision.


190 Initially, the field was dominated by men. That is, until the entry of women anthropologists, such as Audrey Richards. These anthropologists were given funding specifically under the pretense of conducting work among women on ‘women’s issues’. As Richards demonstrated, once they arrived in the field they did not insulate themselves or their work in a gendered way. Rather, they follow-up their own interests, which were at times but not always concerning women. See Goody, The Expansive Moment, Chapter 5

While Rattray remained fascinated with both barbaric and primitive groups comprising his ‘kaleidoscope’ of the north he paid special attention to those stateless, primitive groups of the north-west and north-east that he believed were the furthest removed from European influence. This focus was part of a broader 1920s preoccupation with so-called ‘stateless’ societies. Since much of the indirect rule philosophy centered on tribes and chiefs the question of stateless or ‘acephelous’ groups became increasingly important. This is especially so in the 1920s when reform of native authority became a central goal for administrators. The Nankanse (from which Rattray’s interpreter, Victor Aboya hailed) was one such ‘stateless’ group with which Rattray spent time. While among the Nankanse and Kasena, Rattray gathered information on female circumcision, a topic beyond the scope of Cardinall and Ferguson. It was this information collected among the Nankanse that found its way to Governor Slater and thence to Atholl’s Committee. It was later included in his two-volume publication, *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*:

Clitoridectomy, and also, I believe the cutting away of the labia are still practiced by the majority of the tribes in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. The Nankanse and Kasena perform the operation about the age of puberty, and with them it is the prelude to marriage. Other tribes do so much earlier, at ages varying from a week old to six years. The Namnam, Talense, Dagbwandaba, and Mamprusi do not, as far as I know, ‘cut’ their women at all. This is a custom, which (in spite of being to some extent an incentive to early chastity among those tribes which observe the rite at puberty), should, in my opinion, be firmly but tactfully suppressed by the Administration. When the operation is performed during infancy, it is possibly less dangerous, cruel and painful, but in such cases there is not even the excuse that it serves as a deterrent to early sexual intercourse. When performed at puberty, the fear of ridicule at being found to have lost virginity undoubtedly has served and still serves to encourage
prenuptial chastity. In this case, however, the operation becomes so cruel and even dangerous – fatal results are known to occur – as quite to outweigh any scruples we might have concerning its abolition on the grounds of any indirect good purpose which this custom may serve. To abolish it would meet with at least the silent approval of all those directly concerned, and would not, I believe meet with any opposition in other quarters. One factor alone should make our veto more easily accepted. In a few years, those tribes whose life is here depicted will almost without exception have abandoned their nudity; no one will be so poor as not to be able to afford a cloth. Nakedness and this practice I believe are very closely associated, if not actually a case of cause and effect. No one could read this [his eyewitness account] without feeling that the sooner this ruthless custom is definitely forbidden, the better it will be for all concerned. It should not be beyond the ingenuity of schools and missionary bodies to make sure of and adapt the good precepts which this otherwise barbarous rite enjoins upon its initiates.¹⁹²

I will discuss Rattray’s eyewitness account later in this chapter. For now, it is important to note how this excerpt transgresses the West Africa departmental consensus outlined in Chapter Two. Rattray is careful to speak to officials’ sensitivities about ‘gender chaos’ noting the indirect benefits of the practice, specifically as a puberty rite regulating sexuality and chastity. This was the primary grounds for officials in defending initiation as an integral indigenous institution maintaining age, gender and reproductive relations. But the problem arises when he specifies that it is through his fieldwork – specifically his eyewitness account of the procedure – that he is forced to contradict his earlier support for the practice as a regulator of chastity. Though he concedes it less harmful when performed at infancy (a point to which I will return) he stresses the negative health effects on young girls making this transition into womanhood. In a reversal of

¹⁹² Rattray, 167-168.
administrators’ logic, Rattray argues for direct, legislative action precisely *because* he feels the rite will inevitably die-out. While officials believed natural death precluded governmental intervention, Rattray believed it necessitated it; legislation, not a gradual ‘dying-out’ would harmlessly hasten what was in his opinion inevitable. The harmlessness of intervention would be welcomed, he argues, with ‘silent approval’. In the eyes of officials, there seemed no way of assuring this sort of action would not spark unrest. This concern is further compounded by Rattray’s suggestion that with further integration into the cash economy, peoples of the Northern Territories would be able to buy clothes and abandon nudity, therefore reducing female circumcision practices. This is in direct contention with tenets of indirect rule in the Northern Territories, which were much concerned with blocking the ‘modern’ economy and its trappings - such as clothing – thought to facilitate detribalization.¹⁹³ As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, West Africa policy was unique in the sense that officials went to great lengths to shun privatization and the expansion of capital whilst fostering a myth of the region as a bastion of communal peasant agriculture. Central to maintaining this balance was the prevention of unrest. But following the Women’s War of 1929, concern increased to prevent unrest among women. Thus, the ushering in of further modernization at too quick a pace was unacceptable – just as unacceptable as the unregulated expansion of mission schools in the interior. That Rattray believed mission schools could be trusted with ‘filling the void’ created by the erasure of this initiation rite is perhaps the most dubious

¹⁹³ In her work on ethnicity in the north-west, Carola Lentz notes that while clothing was encouraged by officials in the early 20th century, it was gradually avoided as a marker of detribalization. See Lentz, Chapters 5 and 6.
suggestion in this passage. In the interior in particular, the expansion of female education was discouraged as officials believed it would not be well-received by chiefs and elders.

The above discussion outlines the problems with Rattray’s stance on female circumcision. That is, his favouring of firm, but tactful suppression. However, the animosity with which his position was greeted by the Colonial Office is not readily evident from the excerpt alone. The broader tensions between anthropologists and administrators cannot be fully understood without first discussing the suspicion felt toward anthropologists in Africa at this time and how this suspicious climate allowed officials to dismiss Rattray’s report as ‘unsupported evidence.’

3.2 ‘Unproved evidence’: Anthropologists under Suspicion

In early twentieth century colonial Africa, there remained a strong preference for using local political officers for the purposes of collecting knowledge as it was believed their interests were more aligned with the administration than anthropologists.194 Over time it was realized that the nature of colonial service did not work in the local political or district officer’s favour. Often, officials were moved from district to district. Though they found themselves in charge of ruling through native authorities, they had little time to remain in one place long enough to understand their surroundings. In his memoir, The Wandering of a Misfit: Gold Coast and Gambia, 1928-1945, a district official, R.G. Syme, concisely described the problem, noting that in all his years in the West Africa Service, he spent only two tours of duty in the same station, resulting in what he calls

194 Falk Moore, Anthropology and Africa, 18-19.
“such a ridiculous lack of continuity.” 195 Those in favour of academically trained anthropologists viewed the growth of the discipline in Africa as a solution to this widespread problem.

Despite the necessity for ethnographic information, administrators were particularly sensitive to anthropologists whose information they feared could lead to precipitous intervention and regional instability. As outlined earlier, 1920s fears of political instability reached a fever pitch in West Africa with the 1929 Women’s War in south-eastern Nigeria. The implications of this seemingly abrupt and unexpected outbreak of violence made the need for further ethnographic fieldwork all the more pressing. Following the protests, officials commissioned Rattray’s colleague, C.K. Meek, to study the reasons for the unrest. Meek, who had gained his experience as government anthropologist through his work in Northern Nigeria, was dispatched in 1931 to south-eastern Nigeria. Unlike the Gold Coast, where power centered on Accra, in Nigeria it was the Northern interior that colonial officials had focused on administratively, politically and economically. The south, by comparison, was less centralized and the south-east, in particular, populated by ‘acephelous’ (or headless) societies. These so-called stateless societies drew administrators’ concern as indirect rule only functioned through the securing and maintenance of structures of native authority; where these structures were absent or not readily visible, officials expressed concern. The protests worked to confirm the colonial image of stateless societies as agitators and Meek’s skills as an

anthropologist, though honed in the North, were looked upon as providing the key to understanding a region that administrators felt was less than governable.

Meek’s work in south-eastern Nigeria exemplifies the co-operation that did often exist between government anthropologists and colonial administrators. This co-operation can be partly attributed to the fact Meek is generally considered to be the most conservative of all the government anthropologists at work in West Africa in the 20s. But it is perhaps more productive to view his ethnographic work in the aftermath of the protests as extremely helpful from a policy point of view. First, he concluded that the riots came as a ‘bolt out of the blue.’ Meek understood the riots to be about direct taxation in 1927 and the rumor that such taxation would extend to women. This combined with the low price of palm produce provoked anger. Second, he viewed the unrest as the result of broader dissatisfaction with the system of native administration conducted through “warrant chiefs” who were viewed as corrupt. Precipitated by the consensus, it only took “the spark of a rumor that women, the preparers and marketers of palm produce, were to be taxed” in 1929 “to set the country ablaze.” Above all, Meek felt British administrators had neglected this largely ungovernable part of south-eastern Nigeria and in absence of central authority effective colonial rule was made difficult. Introducing direct taxation was too precipitous without full knowledge of social institutions of the people and, in his words, “the cart had been put before the horse.”

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197 Ibid.

198 Ibid., x.

199 Ibid., xi.
Official’s sough to dissuade unrest and as such, the actions of those working in so-called acephelous societies were managed to ensure nothing was implemented too precipitously.

Meek’s assessment of the 1929 Women’s War served colonial officials well. It was precisely this sort of ethnographic fieldwork that proved the necessity of anthropologists in the colonial service. From an administrative standpoint, this relationship was ideal for reforming indirect rule. As Sally Falk Moore describes in *Anthropology and Africa: Changing Perspectives on a Changing Scene*:

> The policy of formally delegating power to native courts made knowledge of African political and legal institutions an important prerequisite of colonial administration. Anthropologists thought of themselves as useful and expert in the study of such societies. The Government sometimes agreed and used anthropologists for the collection of information or even occasionally in administrative roles.

Even Lugard himself, the heralded architect of indirect rule in Northern Nigeria, extolled the importance of anthropologists in assisting in native reform. In his forward to Meek’s 1937 publication of “Law and authority among the Igbo,” Lugard praised Meek as being part of a “modern school of anthropologists” concerned with research into the “social constitution, the beliefs, and the methods of maintaining internal discipline in the tribes in Africa.” For Lugard and many other administrators, the shared goal of maintaining internal discipline was critical to the colonial project. But the relationship between what was a small cadre of interwar government anthropologists and colonial administrators was not all as rosy as Lugard’s words lead us to believe. After all, he was praising the

200 Falk Moore, 18-19.

201 Meek, v
utilitarian value of anthropologists in the colonial service – the ability for officials to use anthropologists as tools for the creation of better, more efficient systems of colonial governance. What happened when anthropologists themselves diverged from officials version of ‘internal discipline’?

Suspicions that information collected by anthropologists did not correlate with the pressing matters of administrative rule ensured that their findings were under constant questioning. Given the length of periods that anthropologists worked among indigenous populations and the extent to which they cared about their affairs and well-being, officials feared they might even be, as Falk-Moore states, “a subversive influence on the indigènes.” Indeed, by the 1920s, anthropologists were beginning to view their role in collecting information as that of ‘informed spokesmen’ for Africans and intermediaries between the indigenous population and administrators. 202 Standing at once within, but also aside from colonial officials and their projects, anthropologists saw themselves as mediating between colonizers and colonized. This positionality no doubt influenced Goody’s thesis in The Expansive Moment that anthropologists were not mere tools of colonialism, but rather more often in conflict with colonial government.203

3.3 R.S. Rattray in Asante

Though Rattray’s conflict with administrators reached a fever pitch in the Northern Territories, it was his work in Asante which set the tone for his critique of officials’ vision for indirect rule in the Gold Coast. Rattray’s fieldwork in Asante demonstrates that traces of dissention date back to his time as Director at the Asante

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202 Falk Moore, 19.

203 Goody, 7
Anthropological Institute in the early 1920s. This fieldwork continues to attract considerable interest from historians and especially those concerned with how his evolutionist views informed his findings. In T.C. McCaskie’s 1980s review, Rattray’s work on Asante was firmly evolutionist: “His view of the Asante past - forged all at once from experience and from temperament –was metaphysical, mystical even, antiquarian, and mechanically evolutionist. Its strength and influence lay, perhaps, in its coherent simplicity…”

Marking the early development of anthropology as a discipline, classical evolutionism gained prominence in the period spanning the 1860s to the 1890s and in both nature and outlook differed from Darwinian-style evolutionism. The central concern of progress in stages when applied to ethnography fostered an idea of evolution as synonymous with progress or development. E.B. Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan and Herbert Spencer theorized societies progressed at different rates and – most importantly – at different times. As E.B Tylor outlined in his 1871 work, *Primitive Culture*, the culture and civilization question could be understood as involving movement through stages of savagery to barbarism and thence to civilization, which was:

...a general improvement of mankind by higher organization of the individual and society, to the end of promoting at once man’s goodness, power and happiness. This theoretical civilization does in no small measure correspond with actual civilization, as traced by comparing savagery with barbarism, and barbarism with modern educated life. So far as we take into account only material and intellectual culture, this is especially true.

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204 McCaskie, 187-206.

205 Erikson and Murphy, *Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory*, 12.

Acquaintance with the physical laws of the world, and the accompanying of power of adopting nature to man’s own ends, are, on the whole, lowest among savages, mean among barbarians, and highest among modern educated nations.\textsuperscript{207}

This idea of progress prevailed in late nineteenth century circles working to frame Victorian conceptualizations of culture, civilization and Empire.\textsuperscript{208} However, by the time Rattray had begun his fieldwork in Northern Ghana the model had already begun to fall out of favour. One reason for this was that the theoretical work of Henry Maine, E.B Tylor and James Frazer in which Rattray had been trained that focused on making ‘evolutionary reconstructions’ through comparison of written, secondary sources.\textsuperscript{209} After WWI, the rise of social anthropology led by Bronislaw Malinowski began to critique these reconstructions through comparison. Rather than focus on evolutionary stages within a comparative framework, the 1920s saw a push for anthropologists to undertake more fieldwork rather than face critique of evolutionists as ‘armchair anthropologists.’\textsuperscript{210}

This transition from “armchair to active” anthropology took place during Rattray’s Asante fieldwork, but also within the context of larger shifts in colonial policy after WWI. With the League of Nations Mandate system and the re-drawing of former German borders the 1920s became a particularly important period for British colonial

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\textsuperscript{209} Erikson and Murphy, 13.
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\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
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policy in West Africa.\textsuperscript{211} It was a period marked by indirect rule or colonial rule through native authorities. After the success of indirect rule in Northern Nigeria, officials in British Africa struggled to apply principles of indirect rule in their own jurisdictions. However, the unique pre-colonial structure of the Sokoto Caliphate precluded any direct replication of native authority structure elsewhere and much to administrators dismay attempts to rule through native authorities were met with varying degrees of success and at times outright failure. In West Africa societies were in the throes of major social, political and economic transformations discussed in Chapter One. Grafting indirect rule upon existing ‘traditional’ structures proved difficult as societies negotiated the introduction of cash crop agriculture. From an official perspective, these changes had brought ‘gender chaos’ and ‘detribalization.’ This only made the need to re-establish some sense of traditional order more acute. Eager to develop West African societies with minimal disruption (in other words, along with some invention of tradition) officials sought authentic knowledge of what constituted these ‘traditional’ societies.\textsuperscript{212} Increasingly, knowledge production became central to inter-war attempts to rule more effectively through native authorities. To this end, ethnographic work beyond that produced by lowly and always-on-the-move district officer was required. Lengthy fieldwork, rather than short and scattered reports were needed. Increasingly, this burden of colonial knowledge production fell to the few professionally trained anthropologists

\textsuperscript{211} Chapter 4 will discuss the borderlands more thoroughly. For now, see the work of Paul Nugent and A.I. Asiwaju.

\textsuperscript{212} For a discussion on the invention of tradition in colonial Africa see: Hobsbawm and Ranger, \textit{Invention of tradition}. 
hired on contract or brought into the colonial service’s employment as government anthropologists.

It was within this context that Rattray wrote one of his most notable publications, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (1929), where we see his first traces of dissent with the ‘one-size-fits-all’ attempt to implement indirect rule. Path-breaking at the time, it was the only book-length ethnographic study to deal with the subject of African government and law (indeed, his colleague, C.K. Meek, consulted the work for his own study of law in south-eastern Nigeria). In the book’s preface, Rattray expresses frustration with how indirect rule was being implemented in the Gold Coast. He places himself as the classic evolutionist, noting how in his preparations he built upon the work of his mentor R. R. Marett’s notes on ‘Primitive Law.’ However, he also articulates his concerns regarding the administration’s intent to apply a Northern Nigerian style indirect rule to the region. His concern centers on the recent impulse of Christianity in Asante, which he felt must be taken into account and the impact this development would have on the implementation of indirect rule there. According to Rattray, two strategies for native development prevailed in West Africa at the time, neither of which he viewed as suitable to Asante. The first was that of European education and ‘denationalization’ (or detribalization) and the other, what he calls the ‘newer’ school of indirect rule:

They [of the second school] see in it a remedy for many of those ills of ‘denationalization’ which they dread; they have focused their attention on that part of West Africa where this form of Administration has proved successful (at least up to a point), but have often failed, I think to realize the

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one salient fact that, in my opinion, as there assured it success.\textsuperscript{214}

Here, Rattray is referring to Sir Frederick Lugard’s successes in implementing indirect rule in Northern Nigeria. His main problem is that he views its success as isolated to Northern Nigeria and the efforts administrators had taken to block Christian missionaries from proselyting in its predominately Muslim north. This allowed Northern Nigeria’s legal and constitutional system to remain ‘unassailed [sic] and unassailable.’\textsuperscript{215} In contrast, Asante had in fact been assailed by missionaries and fetishism, considered by some to be the lowest form of worship. For Rattray, the problem was how to build indirect rule in Asante upon an infrastructure of mixed fetishism and Christianity:

\begin{quote}
\ldots in introducing Indirect Rule into this country, we would therefore appear to be encouraging on the one hand an institution which draws its inspiration and vitality from the indigenous religious beliefs, while on the other we are systematically destroying the very foundation upon which the structure that we are striving to perpetuate stands.\textsuperscript{216}
\end{quote}

For Rattray, a third way – an alternative – was needed. This lay somewhere between “scrapping the African’s past \textit{en bloc} and the frank acceptability of European civilization in its widest sense” and making well-meaning efforts “to preserve the best of the old culture.”\textsuperscript{217} Rattray believed that officials could not dictate which aspects of African culture were acceptable and which were to be discarded. Officials could not, he argued, state “I will retain this and this, if at the same time we destroy that which gave the whole

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\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{216} Rattray, ix.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
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its dynamic force.” How could officials build indirect rule upon the hollowed remnants of an old structure and the ‘denationalization’ caused by the new impulse toward Christianity?

The views expressed in *Ashanti Law and Constitution* demonstrate Rattray’s hesitancy toward a cookie-cutter approach to indirect rule. Here, he believed that African religion was “coextensive with every action and thought” which made it impossible for officials to arbitrarily pick and choose what should be retained. This is much like E.B Tylor, who first defined ‘culture’ in its modern, anthropological term. According to Tylor: “Culture or Civilization, taken into its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”\(^{218}\) It is clear that this was Rattray’s fundamental problem with the indirect rule mantra ‘to preserve the best of the old culture’: what is considered ‘best’ is adjudicated externally, by colonial officials. Rattray believed that “the African himself must…guide us as to what should be retained.”\(^{219}\) He carried this view forward to claim that people in the Northern Territories would welcome government suppression of female circumcision, reflecting his opinion – as ‘mediator’ or ‘informed spokesman’ – that those colonized should decide what should be retained or discarded. This sort of autonomy or self-determination did not sit well with officials seeking to assert a traditional, communal based system of indirect rule. Moreover, officials believed they knew what was best for “the African” and “his development” and when anthropologists overstepped their mandate, problems arose.

\(^{218}\) Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1.

\(^{219}\) Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, x.
3.4 Rattray and Meek: eyewitness account versus armchair anthropologist

While conducting fieldwork in the north-east, Rattray was provided the opportunity by the medical officer, Dr. Reid, to attend a circumcision ceremony performed at Winkono [sic – Winkongo] in the Talensi Namdam district on 26th August, 1928.  

A man sat down outside the compound beneath the shade of a tree and the girl to be operated on sat between his outstretched legs with her back to him. The man forced open her legs by twisting his own around hers. The pukubega squatted down between the girl’s legs facing her. He took his left hand and covered the girl’s front with it to prevent those looking on from seeing it, only removing his hand to rub his fingers over with earth to prevent from slipping. He then quickly took hold of the part to be cut and severed it as if he were cutting an enemy (datene). He then dug a small hole with the razor which he was using and buried in it the part he had cut off. Again he applied the knife to the other side…The women who were standing by raised the shrill kyenkyelesè cry to make the girl’s heart strong, that she might not cry out on account of pain. The girl struggles, but is held firmly by the man who grips her from behind until the pukubega has finished. A woman comes forward with a birego leaf and binds her up with biro fibre passed between her legs. They then let her go and the girl stands up dazed (gam).

The wounds are not dressed for three days, when an old woman came and washed the sores with a decoction made of dawa dawa husks. It was now found that the operation had not been successful, and another pukubega was called to perform another cutting. The girl wept, but many people seized her and the knife was again set against the place which remained to be cut.

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220 Rattray, *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, 169 – 170. Note that the operator – a male - is referred to as pukubega, while the initiate is called yábègà. Interestingly, he notes that the word pukubega is derived from a word meaning ‘woman’ and a word - kubega – meaning to hurt. Rattray reported it was done by males and this is another reason why his testimony was perceived as dangerous. As we saw in the West African consensus, discussed in Chapter 2, the construction of the practices as entirely of the ‘feminine realm’ allowed administrators an excuse to not intervene.
The treatment with *dawa dawa* is continued for two days, when it is changed for *petere* leaves and *pintuba* and *yilim* roots which are boiled, and this water used for dressing the wounds until they are healed. When she has recovered, the old woman takes ashes on her own palms and blows them over the *yabega*, after which the girl may walk about once more. She will now wear the leaves of the *wantunu* [the calabash pumpkin] until the time comes for the ceremony of ‘throwing away the roots’. The girl’s suitors now vie with each other in bringing presents which the old woman who is attending to her helps in putting in her bag (in pocketing).

The ceremony of throwing away the roots is as follows. On that day beer will be boiled. All the presents which her suitors have brought are divided into two, half for the girl’s mother, half for the old woman. Good food is cooked which the old woman will carry home with her. The girl’s father will also give her a hoe.

All these roots which the old woman used for medicine must be collected and not thrown away until the *dawa dawa* trees are in bloom. Should any of the *yabse* (initiates) die, the old woman is not paid anything. All the dressings used are kept and carefully burned, this ceremony being called *sugur nyoa*. When the time comes for doing this, a basket of *kyea* (i.e., grain at the fourth stage in the brewing of beer), a basket of grain, and guinea-fowls are taken ‘to burn the dressings’ and a sacrifice is made to the girl’s *segere*. In ‘the cutting of women’ girls risk their lives.

Rattray’s eyewitness account goes beyond objective ethnography. He describes the cutting as though the *pukubega* was “cutting an enemy” and how the woman standing by had to raise the shrill *kyenkyelese* cry to strengthen the girl so that “she might not cry out on account of the pain.” His reference to the pain the girl experiences is compounded by his mention of the male operator. In specific, that the girl is “held firmly” by the operator and that after a few days, when it was found the operation had not been successful, the male *pukubega* was called upon to perform another cutting: “the girl wept, but many people seized her and the knife was again set against the place which remained to be cut.”
This is indeed shocking and through this imagery the reader feels he or she is witnessing the procedure themselves. The gendering of the procedure is perhaps the most conspicuous element of the whole account. In Chapter Two, the West Africa department dispatches described female circumcision as a women’s prerogative, even going so far as to describe it as a mode of women’s agency or autonomy in the region. In pointing to male operators, Rattray is complicating the way in which administrators sought to gender female circumcision procedures for Atholl, Rathbone and others who would view the gender dynamics between *pukubega* and *yâbêgâ* as further evidence of a lack of women’s status.

Rattray’s eyewitness account appears to be the first account in British West Africa of a female circumcision ceremony from a white, European government anthropologist. Though Rattray had completed fieldwork in Asante previously, the Akan peoples did not practice female circumcision and even his contemporary, C.K. Meek, had not witnessed a female circumcision ceremony during his fieldwork in West Africa. As a result, by 1928 Rattray’s stance on female circumcision differed markedly from that of Meek whose conservative commentary on circumcision rites in Nigeria was more aligned with the opinions of colonial officials. Indeed, much of the information in Chapter Two’s departmental responses had come from Nigeria, where conservative views had informed official opinion on circumcision.

In 1925, Meek published *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria* followed by *A Sudanese Kingdom: An Ethnographical Study of the Jukun-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, in
In these two works, Meek cautions that it is difficult to make ethnographical conclusions when working in the interior because when it comes to Northern Nigeria, the pre-colonial fluidity which transcends European borders make the region “open to cultural waves from all directions.” Despite these difficulties he emphasized the importance of initiation to maintaining native authority and ‘order.’ In *Northern Tribes* in particular, he makes note of pagan rites, in which boys were trained for a period of time. They were instructed by old men in lore of the tribe, taught obedience and respect and subjected to corporal punishment. His analysis reads almost as a banner for indirect rule: “circumcision and initiation rites have at once political, social and religious character […] strengthening the power of old men and conformity to native morality.”

Meek’s description of female circumcision is reminiscent of departmental responses discussed in Chapter Two insofar as he was concerned mostly with the origins. He notes how it was practiced by ancient Egyptians and Copts and was still customary among Arabs, Galla, Abyssinians, Mosi, Mandingoes and natives of Kordofan. It was practiced between ages of 7 and 15 and “done by old women, no explanation for the rite is given, but it’s believed to be an aid to chastity.” The two interrelated themes of origins and sexuality – rather, control of sexuality – are present here. Again, this is similar to the

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222 Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, 160.

223 Meek, 87.

224 Ibid., 90.
departmental responses in which administrators relegated their concern for female circumcision to regulating chastity, reproduction and sexual control. Of course, Rattray was also careful to speak to these “indirect benefits,” noting:

If a woman is not cut, she is teased. If she is found to not be a virgin during the operation then she will be shamed by neighbors. Young men will call her a worthless thing. On account of this, it is very difficult to get a young girl to consent to intercourse before. If a girl ‘weakens’ when sleeping beside a boy on a mat, her love will then pay a bribe to the operator to save the disgrace following the exposure of her condition. Non virgins are called sulim and virgins are called yab pelego a white yabega. It is also shameful for her love and his friends will tell him that he has ‘destroyed’ the girl [sic].

However, unlike Meek Rattray did not see these indirect benefits as important enough to excuse the brutality of the procedure.

Without the benefit of the eyewitness account, Meek remained firmly influenced by the evolutionist concepts of ‘uniformism’ and ‘survivals.’ The concept of ‘uniformism’ was central to the evolutionist search for ‘origins.’ Uniformism was the reconstruction of “specific processes leading to a particular belief, moral, or set of cultural knowledge.” Since evolutionists believed culture was a cognitive construction by similar minds all set upon solving problems one could theoretically retrace the logical steps that led to a superstition, folk belief, or ‘irrational’ practice.” For example, if two

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225 Ibid., 91.
228 Moore, Visions of Culture: an introduction to anthropological theories and theorists, 10.
societies have analogous cultural traits (pottery or monotheism) it is because either the
trait has diffused from one society to another or because of independent inventions. These
were the product of a universal response to similar situations.\textsuperscript{229} This was intimately
connected to the evolutionist concept of survivals. Here, ‘survivals’ were elements of
culture that, though outdated, survived on into the present. For example, one says ‘god
bless you’ when another sneezes.\textsuperscript{230} For classical evolutionist anthropologists, these
survivals were “relics of ‘primitive barbarism’ which allowed the ethnographer to
reconstruct earlier cultural patterns and ultimately define the evolution of culture.”\textsuperscript{231}
Employing these concepts, Meek’s description of female circumcision was that it was
“probably a non-Negro custom, grafted on the tribal cult, and that while they give clear
reasons for initiation, they are unable to give any for circumcision.”\textsuperscript{232} Through the logic
of uniformism alone, Meek seems to have believed that female circumcision did not need
legislating away since it was grafted upon primitive societies and would gradually
therefore die-out as the societies evolved over time.

How does one make sense of Rattray’s and Meek’s differing positions on
circumcision? Both applied evolutionist approaches to their fieldwork and both believed
societies could be divided into barbaric and primitive categories. Indeed, they shared the
belief that female circumcision was introduced to animist societies by barbaric peoples
who had come to settle and assert their domination. Both believed it would eventually

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 11

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{232} Meek, \textit{Northern Tribes}, 85.
die-out as these societies progressed along the evolutionary scale. Meek blamed Protestant missions for opposing female circumcision, “no doubt because it is not a European custom.” Moreover, he joined officials in the view that “there would seem to be no reason for interfering with the practice of clitoridectomy, but good grounds for discouraging the mutilation of the labia.” Meek’s position on the issue is unique in that it reflects the climate of Northern Nigeria, namely the hostility felt by administrators toward Christian missionary’s proselytizing among the Muslim majority. Whereas for Rattray, Christian missionaries provided an opportunity to ‘fill the void’ that would be left once the practice was abolished. For Rattray, the evolutionary argument that it would eventually die-out formed the basis for why immediate action was necessary; if the practice would die-out anyway, why not use the powers of the colonial state to accelerate its end?

It is tempting to place considerable emphasis on the effects of the eyewitness account on Rattray’s position. Certainly, it seems to have provoked him to move beyond the classic evolutionist stance taken by Meek toward circumcision. It also seems to have pushed him to dismiss the seeming benefits of circumcision for maintaining age and sexual relations – put simply, native authority and ‘order.’ However, it is important to remember that Rattray’s research methodology remained firmly rooted in the consulting and interviewing of ‘grey-bearded men’, often chiefs. These men themselves had a vested interest in controlling women’s sexuality and affirming their own patriarchal power amidst a quickly shifting social, political and economic terrain. In this sense, Rattray’s statement that intervention would be met with ‘silent approval’ of all of those involved

233 Meek, Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe, 293.
must be questioned: the silent approval of whom and to whose advantage? If there is some credence to the claim that initiation and its attendant rites (including circumcision) were controlled by elder women, then we must ask how elder men might have benefited from its discontinuance. This question, given Rattray’s research methodologies, is important to consider. The irony is that Rattray was disinclined (as many ethnographers as the time were) to consider women’s viewpoints, but was willing to engage in the voyeuristic enterprise of viewing a procedure. The girl in the procedure may have been communicating – through cries and visible expressions of pain – but she was nevertheless a ‘passive’ native informant. Rattray could discern what he wanted from the performance without actually speaking to or consulting with the girl. This is an important point. While Rattray participated in the procedure as an observer, he was actively en-textualizing and re-entextualizing the visual data without consulting the women involved.

3.5 Tin’danas (earthpriests) and native authority in Northern Ghana

Another reason why it is important not to place too much emphasis on Rattray’s eyewitness account is that it seems his position on female circumcision was implicated in his broader critique of existing native authorities – chiefs – in Northern Ghana. Contrary to officials, Rattray believed earth-priests were natural native administrators for the Northern Territories. 234 His position was that the priests represented a primitive native

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234 Carola Lentz has stated that Rattray’s obsession with land priests points to his belief that they represented the ‘germ’ of would-be centralized states, like that of Ashanti. The idea was that northerners could not progress along “their own native lines” to that of the Asante system without them. She has also said that while Rattray made a big deal about land priests they were not, actually, that important. It should be noted that her work is specifically focused on the north-west and does not necessarily apply to the north-east, in equal measure. Although this thesis does not endeavor to comment on the importance of land priests to north-eastern groups, it does stress that Lentz’s critique cannot be held for this region.
polity that was an “embryonic but interrupted form of the Akan structure.”

Christian Lund credits Rattray as the first to connect earth-priests to land and thence to their role in “the modern administration of the protectorate.”

As primitives, they were the prototype of an Ashanti chief in their capacity as custodians of ancestral spirits. Most importantly, he reasoned that had it not been for the invasion of warrior tribes who settled in the North and, in particular, for British colonization, earth-priests would be the natural choice for native authority. As the organic keepers of land, they were automatically less corrupt than the European selected chiefs who Rattray felt lacked local legitimacy. These chiefs had not only assumed the earth-priests rightful place as gatekeepers of authority, but some even denied that earth priests existed. Rattray considered these chiefs ‘a real menace’ and went so far as to say that “these upstarts would not survive long were we to leave the country.”

Unlike in south-eastern Nigeria, where Meek felt officials merely put ‘the cart before the horse’, Rattray’s position on earthpriests implies that British colonial rule disrupted the natural order of things. In effect, it arrested the region from following its natural, evolutionary path.

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unless further research is conducted. Lentz, Ethnicity and the making of history in northern Ghana, Chapter 2.


236 Ibid.

237 Ibid., 38.

238 This is a bit dubious. And if chiefs did deny their existence it was only posturing for British officials to ensure they retained their places as native authorities.

239 Rattray, Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland, Introduction.
Here in the North this natural process of evolution, from the Priest-King to the Territorial rule was interrupted by external influences which produce a really remarkable state of affairs. These it is well we should understand before embarking on schemes for Indirect Rule or a new native Administration.  

Rattray felt strongly enough to argue for the colonial administration to revisit its established notions on native polity and native land tenure rather than use those he saw as colonial (and hence foreign) imposed chiefs. According to Allman and Parker, in taking such a contentious stance on the earth-priest matter, Rattray had come to be known as a far from well-connected colonial ‘insider.’ Rather, he was regarded with suspicion and sometimes outright hostility by district commissioners in the north and by his superiors in Accra. In the Colonial Office, as early as 1924 officials considered him most knowledgeable of “the African mind,” but agreed that this did not make him fit to administer a Province.

Rattray felt that in not employing earth-priests as rightful native authorities the damage had already been done. The Northern Territories were not, nor could ever be, cut off from western influences. Like administrators Eyre-Smith and Duncan-Johnstone, he shared the belief that western influences and commercialization had already impacted the North considerably. Rattray’s original view of the North as untouched and pristine was starkly challenged when he viewed the Tongnaab shine in 1928. John Parker and Jean Allman discuss his visit fully in Tongnaab: The History of a West African God, but what

240 Ibid.

241 Allman and Parker, 194-195.

242 Minutes, Enquiries whether consideration has ever been given to the question of sending Colonial Administrators to the School to study - , Anthropology, December 18th, 1924, TNA U.K., CO 59403
is important to note here is simply that through this visit Rattray was able to grasp the extent to which earth-priests, whom he felt were the natural native authorities, had been touched by commercialization in the North. That so many pilgrims from the South had made the considerable journey to the north-east to ask the god for wealth illustrated the equally considerable and far-reaching effects of the cash economy on a region. His belief that female circumcision was connected to nudity illustrates this point. Rattray felt that since clothing was becoming more prevalent, female circumcision would decrease along with nudity. Indeed, even the element of chastity had been commercialized in the procedure. According to Rattray, “fowl and grain is given to the man who performs the operation if the initiate is a virgin. If she [the initiate] is not a virgin she must be a thousand cowries or a hoe. If the woman has already conceived, the operator must be given a goat.”

Rattray’s support for earth-priests was rooted in his belief that they were organic keepers of the land. And since they were guardians of the land, earth-priests influenced initiation, both in terms of timing and taboos governing the procedure. In Tribes, he pointed out how the ceremonies traditionally took place after the cutting of the nara (early millet):

Not all girls are ‘cut’; for some it is a taboo of their guardian spirit; some, who know they are not virgins, avoid the operation because they fear ridicule; others are merely frightened. Any girl, however, who is not cut is laughed at all the time by other women. ‘If you step across my yoka pumpkins you will spoil them’, they will say to such an [sic] one.

243 Rattray, Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland, 168-69.

244 Ibid., 168.
That some guardian spirits outlawed female circumcision further supported his belief that earth-priests were organic and natural authorities. The natural order of things had been thrown-off by the institution of chieftaincy. Once a puberty rite that might take place once a woman was fully developed and ready to marry (it was taboo for a woman to be cut too soon), circumcision had now under colonial influences had altered. “These days,” lamented Rattray, “women do not wait until they are matured enough, and one sees girls who are not fully grown seeking ‘the cutting place.’”

Certainly, changes in the timing of circumcision and initiation can be linked to land and wealth; when harvests were not good or when famines took place as they sometimes did in the north-east, initiation ceremonies could not be carried out properly or were delayed. These facilitated changes in circumcision practices. Even the conservative Meek made note of changes in male circumcision, specifically how the practice was becoming dislocated from initiation. In evolutionary terms, he viewed male circumcision as being ‘grafted’ by Muslims upon animist beliefs, noting the fluidity among animists in practicing the rite. But he makes the consequences of this grafting clear in his example of the Yergum people. He notes that while the Yergum practice, their chief does not. If the chief does, crops would fail. This Meek saw as an indicator that either they’ve changed their ancient custom, or that the Yergum chiefs are of “foreign extraction.” Moreover, the ‘separation’ or dislocation of circumcision from

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245 Rattray, 168.

246 This will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

247 Meek, Northern Tribes, 84.
initiation he wrote was recent, as it only recently became a separate rite “on account of the inconveniently long intervals which separate the holding of initiation ceremonies.”

3.6 Rattray’s breach of consensus

Rattray’s attendance – in conjunction with the attendance of a medical officer, Dr. Reid – assured the question of taking administrative action against female circumcision would be dismissed. Citing a concern for those peoples involved in the ceremony, the Colonial Office used the eye-witness attendance of Rattray and Dr. Reid to undermine the argument for suppression of the practice:

On reading Dr. Reid’s report one is struck by the confidence these people had in this Medical Officer as is shown by their invitation to him to be present at the ceremony. Will not the introduction of legislation to prevent this ceremony appear to these people to be a betrayal of the trust placed in Dr. Reid? If this is so these people will be very slow to take Europeans into their confidence in the future.

Here, the Colonial Office was expressing concern with how the people may lose trust in Europeans and therefore in European-appointed native administration. But also we see the distrust colonial authorities felt toward anthropologists themselves and whether their work would destabilize colonial maintenance of order. Thus the eyewitness account transgressed what was an acceptable. Not only did it place a male government anthropologist at a ceremony considered to be a woman domain, but it also provided him the opportunity as one of the few male government officials to witness the practice, to

248 Ibid.

249 Chief Comissioner of the Northern Territories, Tamale, to Accra. June, 4th, 1931, Female Excision (Circumcision), NAGA 8/2/34
position himself as an authority on the matter. In effect, Rattray cast himself in the role of judge, jury, and executioner regarding what ‘of the best of African culture’ should be retained and what should not.

What’s more, his argument hinged upon a very materialist sense of cause and effect. He believed nudity to be a major reason for circumcision’s continuance and rationalized that as people came to be able to afford clothing more readily, circumcision would slowly die-out. This inflection of materialism seems out of place for an evolutionist such as Rattray, but as Robert Carneiro notes, historical materialism had at this time begun to influence classical evolutionists.

…the classical evolutionists were moving toward a greater recognition for the role of material conditions in cultural advance and that they expressed this with some frequency…the classical evolutionists were in the pioneer stage of their science, and their thought was still burdened with excessive amounts of rationalism, romanticism, and metaphysics inherited from an earlier age.  

This materialist take on nudity as cause and effect gets picked up once again in the post-independence period under Nkrumah. This will be dealt with in Chapter Six. But suffice it to say, it is a belief that persists and the materialist argument only becomes more pertinent as the state becomes increasingly developmentalist. At the time in 1930s, the state was still very much inclined to development along gradualist lines and this meant the dying-out of undesirable practices. Legislation was simply too abrupt a solution and the policing of legislation, almost impossible. Moreover, even if Rattray believed the practice would eventually die-out naturally, there was no need to act precipitously or as

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Meek had said of taxation in south-eastern Nigeria, ‘put the cart before the horse.’

Rattray’s proposal for “alien” [European] legislation was dismissed; according to administrators, legislation was to follow civilization, not precede it.\textsuperscript{251}

3.7 Conclusion: ‘scissors and paste policy’ in Northern Ghana

One excerpt taken from the preface of \textit{Tribes} was of particular note to the Special Commissioner for Anthropology as it summarized Rattray’s attitude about the implementation of indirect rule in the region:

[I] lend this report with a word of advice and well-meant warning to those in whose hands lie the destinies of the Northern Territories. Twenty-two years’ experience of the Gold Coast has shown me that there is sometimes a tendency to work out and elaborate schemes for local projects upon lines and on a basis which have been evolved, perfected, and worked with great success elsewhere. Such scissors and paste policy may produce quite fine results on paper. What is required at this stage however is for us to examine those human records which alone supply us with data we require.\textsuperscript{252}

Here, Rattray alludes to the real conflict with his work in the Gold Coast: that his superiors differed from him in how they saw ‘development along native lines’ and the use of ethnography or ‘human data’ in the implementation of indirect rule. While Rattray’s professional work has been criticized as being “an offspring of his personality” it is

\textsuperscript{251} Secretary for Native Affairs to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 2 June, 1931, “Female Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory,” \textit{Female Excision (Circumcision)}, 1930-3, NAGT 3

\textsuperscript{252} Excerpt from Rattray’s last report as Government Anthropologist, 1929-30, \textit{Gold Coast Government Report by the Special Commissioner for Anthropology 1927-30}, Ms 722.9s, RHL
difficult not to think his eyewitness account influenced his position. But the
differences ran deeper than that. For Rattray, the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast
necessitated its own style of indirect rule, not one ‘cut and pasted’ from Northern Nigeria.
These sentiments were expressed quite early in his work on Asante where he noted the
region’s heterogeneity as complicating officials’ vision for an indirect rule system based
solely on traditional or authentic structures. Though he may have had high hopes for
uncovering the North as the primitive, authentic germ of Asante society, Rattray quickly
realized the fluidity and convergence of tribes in the interior. This was a point that even
the conservative Meek made, albeit along racist lines. There were serious difficulties for
a system that sought to govern through strict, compartmentalized ideas of ‘tribe.’

Rattray’s critique of chiefs did not undermine his penchant for indirect rule. Like,
Governor Ransford Slater who was also a proponent of indirect rule, Rattray was part of a
team which included fellow thinkers, W.J.A. Jones, H.A. Blair and Duncan-Johnstone.
All were deeply committed to implementing the doctrine of indirect rule in the North.
Slater’s support for Rattray’s position on female circumcision did not undercut this
commitment to indirect rule, either. Both Slater and Rattray were committed to
implementing indirect rule, but sought to do so in a way which reflected the natural and
authentic power structures in the North. They were viewed by the Colonial Office as at
times eccentric in their paternalism, but it is worth remembering that by the late 1920s,
administrators had decided to move away from an active development agenda for the
North. The days of Governor Guggisberg and his grandiose plans of railways and

\[253\] McCaskie, 197.

\[254\] Grischow, 88
infrastructure were over. The aim was to implement a system of indirect rule which would facilitate labour migration without destabilizing African community and official visions for peasant agriculture.

Similarly to the arbitrary appointment of paramount chiefs lacking popular support, female circumcision was judged as something inauthentic to the Gold Coast. Rattray’s view that female circumcision was brought into the Gold Coast by foreign or barbaric societies shaped the practice’s characterization as inauthentic. This dovetailed with his concerns regarding European-backed chiefs who, in his eyes, were little more than local despots who lacked popular support. Rattray’s position on earth-priests was thus rooted in his vision of re-setting the North to its organic, authentic path of development. Similarly, Rattray felt that government action against female circumcision would be welcomed with ‘silent approval’ because – like European appointed chiefs – the practices lacked popular support. Both chiefs and female circumcision were ‘imported’ and within the parlance of Mahmood Mamdani, part of the tyranny of colonial imposed local despots. Thus, while his push for the state to suppress the practice certainly took on a tone of individual rights, it was also about his commitment to implement a system of native authority that was authentic and traditional without corrupting, outside influences. As a ‘foreign’ practice, female circumcision was viewed by Rattray as imported into the Gold Coast and therefore of relatively recent origins. In this way, his take on female circumcision did not betray the classical evolutionism scholars agree informed much, if not all, of his work. Rather, it was this almost idealistic commitment to development


256 Mamdani, Citizen and Subject, Part I, Chapter 3.
through stages along African lines which, paradoxically, made him an ‘outsider’ in colonial society.

Historians concerned with female circumcision often focus on what was happening in Kenya with the controversy in the 1930s. Malinowski’s functionalism and his student’s defense of Kikuyu circumcision (Jomo Kenyatta) in Facing Mount Kenya (1938) is point of reference. But this thesis does not deal with the body of anthropological work which includes the cohort of Meyer Fortes. Government anthropologists and what they had to say about female circumcision have not been given much attention mostly because, in the case of West Africa, Rattray and Meek were the only working government anthropologists in 1930. In several ways, Rattray’s findings on circumcision right at end of his career mark a transition in anthropology as a discipline. Malinowski’s functionalist school of anthropology was on the horizon with its concern for the study of societies as functional wholes. Meyer Fortes, who trained with Malinowski and would come to work on the Northern Territories after Rattray (1934 and 37), represented the future while Rattray represented the discipline’s early life. As Allman and Parker have noted, the gap between the careers of these two is a “fundamental dividing line in the practice of the discipline [of anthropology] in West Africa.”


258 Falk Moore states, “Malinowski was especially concerned with policies that might be damaging to Africans and angrily criticised both the record of violence that had been perpetrated against Africans by colonial administrators and less lethal but nevertheless damaging blunders in the ongoing matter of land tenure policy,” 28.

259 Allman and Parker, 194.
Though government anthropologists were commissioned to conduct ethnographic work to effect the better implementation of indirect rule, their employment in the colonial service did not preclude objections to colonial policy. Government anthropologists in 1920s Africa were provided little room to express political dissent; working within but not completely wedded to colonial administrators, they were held to an unsaid policy of co-operation. Any actions eliciting more than the slightest embarrassment, notes Falk Moore, would be grounds for dismissal. While the Colonial Office considered anthropologists’ fieldwork valuable, they often found themselves under suspicion when expressing their own autonomy in the field and publications. It was feared that they—being within but also apart from the system—could go their own path and this is why many officials in colonial administration viewed them with suspicion. The swift refutation by the Colonial Office of Rattray’s “unsupported evidence” on female circumcision is exemplary of this tendency. The Colonial Office’s critique of Rattray’s report on female circumcision as suspicious and uncorroborated aptly demonstrates the ambivalence felt toward anthropologists. Clearly, early anthropologists were not intellectual prisoners to rigidly perceived ‘schools’ of thought. Rather, following

260 Falk Moore, 20.

261 Ibid, 19.

262 Ambivalence that was no less felt during the era of Malinowski, but I argue was less hard to define, or articulate in this early period when few British government anthropologists worked in the region. This hesitation on the part of the British was especially curious in West Africa, given the surge in ethnography on the part of the French.

263 Taking his mentor, Meyer Fortes, as his primary subject, Goody explains how he drew from functionalist paradigms, yet operated independently and sometimes outside the colonial mandate. This was an argument that he cautions should be applied to other studies of anthropologists in order to break
Tylor, the nascent discipline grew and with its growth came a burgeoning cadre of anthropologists with varying interests and fieldwork methodologies despite their schools of training.\textsuperscript{264}

Rattray’s research findings did not usher in further inquiry or legislative intervention as the Colonial Office feared. However, they did lead to more local inquiries by administrators into the practice of female circumcision in the north-east of Ghana. They were specifically interested in how to use education and propaganda rather than legislation to manage the practice. This translated into schemes that at least on paper, sought to promote the alteration of the procedure from a puberty rite to one conducted at infancy. Conversely, the schemes involved the use of chiefs to try to persuade people to ‘voluntarily’ give up the practice. As administrators along the north-eastern borderland would discover, this was easier said than done.

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Chapter 4

Female circumcision as undesirable in north-eastern Ghana, c. 1930-1933

In 1930, the Colonial Office declared R.S. Rattray’s findings on female circumcision in Northern Ghana to be unsupported. His original commission in the North was to gather information on the tribes and native authorities in order to facilitate reform and amalgamation of the Northern Territories. The state’s refusal to listen to Rattray on the subject of earth-priests and female circumcision demonstrates suspicions felt toward anthropologists in the 1920s, but it also demonstrates the state’s unwillingness to alter its vision for reform in the North. According to Rattray, officials intended to pursue a ‘scissors and paste’ template of indirect rule. By the time of Rattray’s retirement there were signs that the state was interested in Sir Donald Cameron’s indirect rule system put in place in late 1920s Tanganyika. Cameron had previous colonial service experience in Nigeria and as Governor of Tanganyika until 1931 he was responsible for revising many of Lord Lugard’s political memoranda on indirect rule.265 His vision of indirect rule differed from Lugard and his main contribution was as John Iliffe describes, “the construction of conciliar systems for stateless peoples;”266 in other words, how to implement indirect rule in regions where centralized, chieftaincy structures did not exist

265 Cameron arrived in Tanganyika in 1925 as Governor. He had served in Nigeria for 17 years. He was now appointed by the Labour government as a “man of liberal views, administrative efficiency, and personal dynamism”. John Iliffe, A modern history of Tanganyika. African studies series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 320.

266 Ibid., 323.
or were simply less clear. In this approach, indirect rule was very much “a means of social control rather than social progress.” But at the heart of social control were district officials. Upon entering Tanganyika, Cameron was disappointed to see many officials carrying out their duties as they saw fit with little structural guidance. To rectify this, he went about creating general instructions for district officials about how to handle questions of native policy. One such memo was entitled ‘The Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory.’ Circulated in 1931 and authored by Cameron’s collaborator and then Secretary of Native Affairs, Sir Philip Mitchell, the pamphlet addressed the issue of female circumcision and the status of women in Tanganyika. It was both a response to Atholl’s Committee inquiries into the status of women in 1930 and a condemnation of Governor Grigg’s handling of the female circumcision controversy in Kenya.

Female circumcision was framed by Mitchell and Cameron along tribal lines. As a tribal practice, intervention could spark backlash and as a result, proscriptive legislation was comprehensively condemned in the pamphlet. By 1933, Cameron had left Tanganyika to begin a post as Governor of Nigeria. The pamphlet was sent to the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories shortly thereafter and instructions were issued to Northern district officials about how to manage the issue of female circumcision through native authorities. The instructions urged officials to focus on propaganda and education that would lead to the practice’s eventual abandonment. It was an approach Cameron and Mitchell termed in the pamphlet “the inevitability of gradualness.”

267 Ibid., 326.

268 Secretary for Native Affairs to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 2 June, 1931, “Female Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory,” Female Excision (Circumcision) 1930-3, NAGT 3
Rattray’s findings at the close of the 1920s sparked the interest of Governor Slater and shortly after the Colonial Office dismissed Rattray’s position, he requested the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories to canvas district officials for further information on female circumcision practices. Seeking out information on this issue of female circumcision was a delicate task, particularly given district commissioners’ youth and/or newness and what was often their constant rotation from one district to another.\(^{269}\) However, in March of 1933, the Chief Commissioner took particular note of an informal diary from one officer stationed in Kusasi district in the north-east, J.K.G Syme. Kusasi district was Syme’s first station and he began his post in March of 1929. His first mention of female circumcision is a diary entry dated January of 1933. It was a marginal note with details about which tribes practiced it in the north-east and explaining that in Kusasi district it prevailed among the Moshis, Busangas and Yangas but not among Kusasis themselves “except in isolated cases where they have been influenced by outsiders.”\(^{270}\) Syme’s categorization of female circumcision practices along tribal lines demonstrates the way in which district officials understood tribal structures in the North. Syme felt the Kusasi were being exposed to ‘outsiders’ but his construction of ‘outsider’ used colonial-imposed borders to position ‘outsiders’ as Africans residing across the Anglo-French boundary.

\(^{269}\) Chief Commissioner, A. Duncan Johnstone, southern province, Duncan to Director of Medical Services, Tamale. 16 June, 1930, *Female Excision, 1931*, NAGT 8/2/34

\(^{270}\) ‘Clitoridectomy’, Syme, Asst. District Commissioner, District Commissioner’s Office, Kusasi District, Bawku, Northern Territories to Chief Commissioner’s Office, Tamale, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933. *Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3*, NAGT 3
The boundaries of Northern Ghana cut across kin and linguistic groups and were
drawn-up in the late 19th century with the help of the Fanti official George Ekem
Ferguson. Ferguson had ventured to the north to secure trade treaties with tribes and
solidify Britain’s sphere of influence against French and German powers. Following
Ferguson’s travels, the Anglo-French border was negotiated and the Gold Coast’s
northernmost boundary was set. But in the north-east, the border was extremely difficult
for officials on either side to distinguish as the geographical markers normally marking
the boundary – rivers and rocks – were not clear in the dry season. Officials admitted that
without these markers administrators were unsure as to where their district’s jurisdiction
ended and a cercle began. Added to this was the post-war League of Nations Mandate
which ceded much of Togoland’s western borderlands to the British. This extended the
Gold Coast’s eastern and north-eastern border considerably. In the north-east, the town of
Pusiga near Bawku came into British jurisdiction and those living in the former German
territory were automatically incorporated into British rule.

271 See: Kwame Arhin ed. The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson: A Fanti official of the government of the
Gold Coast, 1890-1897 (Cambridge: African Studies Centre, 1974).

272 This sort of confusion is also mentioned by Paul Nugent in his study of the southern Ghana-Togo
border zone. He notes that after partition the border was scarcely visible to the naked eye. Even now, a
mere fence marks the demarcation in Lomé, hardly a border in a physical sense. Paul Nugent, Smugglers
Figure 4 – Map showing Togoland mandated area which came under British rule. Note the proximity of Bawku to Pusiga and the nearness of both towns to the Anglo-French border.

Northern Territories Economic Survey c. 1935, TNA U.K., CO 96/87/9
This created much confusion along the newly integrated borderlands. In one diary entry a British official related his telling of a particular population along the old Franco-German border lying within the French zone that they were now French and neither German or British subjects:

The people were astounded to hear they were, with little doubt, French subjects; so much so indeed that already they are asking permission to move. The difficulty is caused by the present boundary being nothing but an imaginary straight line drawn from the [...] to the junction of an unmarked and unidentifiable (in dry season) stream with the river Kulpealoga.  

As late as 1932, uncertainty lingered regarding the far north-eastern frontier between Mogonori and Pusiga and this confusion forced British and French authorities to work together in order to identify demarcations concretely. According to the district official involved, nothing had been done “since early days of arbitrary boundary with France.”

The French saw these joint investigations into the frontier demarcation as opportunities to re-draw the frontier. Officials complained that every year the population of Upper Volta seems to decrease and they felt shifting the border in their favour could recoup “anywhere from 1,500 -2,000 peoples” who fled French territory to the Gold Coast because of taxes and conscription.  

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273 Kusasi Informal Diary, June 22, 1922, 68, NAGA 57/5/1

274 Kusasi Informal Diary, March 24, 1932, NAGA 57/5/1. This momentary co-operation led to sometimes amicable Anglo-French relations, demonstrated in sharing of leisure time. It seems as though while working on the border demarcation, the French commandant admired his British counterpart’s ‘coldbox’, referring to how it keeps beer fresh as the “Bakou système”.

275 L’Inspecteur de lere classe des Colonies, Chef de Mission en Haute-Volta a Monsieur le Ministre des Colonies, Dakar, le 1er Juin, 1925. Mission Picanon (1924-25), Fonds ministeriels, CAOM 1AFFPOL/3057
The construction of colonial space in the north-east was complex not only because of the post-war shifting of borders but also because of the amalgamation of the Northern Territories. In the north-east, Mamprusi native authority became paramount and along with some district reshuffling, tribes in the north-east such as the Kusasi were subsumed under Mamprusi rule. Officials believed Mamprusi were the natural rulers in the region and efforts were focused on convincing the Kusasi and other groups to submit to the Mamprusi paramount chiefly (Nayeri) authority. An important part of this process was establishing the history of tribes. As Grischow notes, the British tried whenever possible to preserve what they considered the traditional structure of the North, especially if they could ‘prove’ that migrants’ histories were “lies.”  

Much of this was done through the work of W.A. Cardinall and R.S. Rattray who framed their ethnographic work by origins, migration, and first-comers. District officials also contributed to this endeavor. Shortly after he arrived, Syme set out about writing *The Kusasis: A Brief History.* The project focussed on describing Kusasi origins – that is, where they came from and whether they were autochthonous (originating where found or indigenous) to the north-east. In his introduction, he writes:

That part of the Kusasi Tribe which lives in English Territory occupies the fertile lands which lie North of the Gambaga Escarp and East of the Red Volta. Unlike some of their neighbors further West they are blessed with an ample food supply, while their cattle are considered among the best in the country. The area these people inhabit is known as the Kusasi District, though actually now-a-days, owing mostly to immigration from French Country, the Kusasis only form about two thirds of the total population.

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276 Grischow, 92.

277 *The Kusasis: A Brief History* by J.K.G. Syme, D.C., NAGT 8/2/214.
and even many of them are only Kusasis in name. In some densely populated sections there are no Kusasis at all. The principal town and Administrative headquarters is Bawku, but it is common to refer to the whole District by that name.  

Though it seems Syme is illustrating the Kusasi as autochthonous to the district, he is quick to explain the word Bawku as a corruption of the Mamprusi word ‘Boku’.

According to Syme, most Kusasis inhabited the land west of the White Volta having migrated southward over the Anglo-French border. Those residing east of the Volta in the area named Agolle (named after a local fetish hill) were few because “so far as Agolle is concerned much of Bawku is now inhabited by Busangas and Pusiga full of Yangas.”

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278 NAGT 8/2/214. The Kusasis: A Brief History by J.K.G. Syme, D.C.

279 Ibid., Introduction
Figure 5 - ‘Map of Kusasi’ c. 1930 drawn by J.K. G. Syme, District Commissioner, Kusasi District, NAGT 8/2/214. Officials stationed in Bawku kept close relations with administrators from the cercles of Sansamango, located at the bottom right corner of this map, in French mandated Togo and Tenkodugu, located at the very top of the map, in French Upper Volta. In his Brief History, Syme tried to argue that the chief of Tenkodugu was of greater importance than the chief of Wagadugu [sic – Ouagadougu], but that the French had vested paramount status in the latter and this had diminished Tenkodugu’s former power. This is important to note since Syme reports that it was the Chief of Tenkudugu who commanded most of the Yangas and many of Busangas and Moshis. He feels this necessary to note since there are “many thousands of Moshis, Busangas and Yangas living among the Kusasis”.

For Syme, this description of Kusasi origins was too straightforward and after completing his interviews he felt strongly that “when writing of the Kusasis one has to
remember that the name Kusasi is really very vague when referring to the people of Agolle and not always correct […] For it is consistently used to include people who are not true Kusasis at all.”

For Syme, the ‘true’ Kusasis were originally a small tribe and it was only comparatively recently that “a large population has grown up consisting of people known as Kusasi.” He explained this growth in the vague tribal affiliation of Kusasi by explaining that a large proportion of present-day Kusasis were descendants of “unions between Kusasis and imported slaves” with others being “descendants of Moshi, Grunshi and B’mobo immigrants (to mention a few only) who have come in at different times in search of better lands than their own and who for generations have intermarried with the Kusasis.”

Though he traced present-day descendants to unions with slaves, he found it ‘strange’ that it was the Kusasi who, during the slave raids, prospered most in the selling of slaves.

Perhaps because of the various intermarriages, Syme stressed that the original group was quite small in number and as it grew through these unions it divided into clans making it even more difficult to discern ‘origins.’ “If one asks a Kusasi where his grandfather comes from he will probably reply that as he wasn’t there to see he really doesn’t know […] But if one makes careful inquiry when told this it generally transpires that their forebears were Mampruis who settled down in Kusasi and took Kuasasi wives.”

He went on to note as “As already described the new-comers adopted the customs of the country and after a generation or two their descendants became Kusasis to

280 Ibid.

281 Ibid., Chapter 1.

282 Ibid., 7
all intents and purposes. “It is most unlikely that the real Kusasis were over in Gambaga at all.” The Goachi-Kusasis [a Kusasi clan] and people of Pusiga, he added, will “tell fairy stories about their celestial origin.” 283 “In the majority of cases, however, if one press them to cast their minds still further back the Kusasis will say that they have heard that in the distant past their ancestors came from far away to the East.” 284

Though he eventually pointed to Kusasi migration from the east, he hesitated to reify ethnographic linkages drawn between Kusasi and Hausa. In particular, he took issue with J. Withersgill’s Moshi History, which attempted to trace Kusasi origin from Hausa manuscripts explaining how his own exhaustive enquiries failed to lend the slightest bit of corroboration to Withersgill’s claims. Particularly vexing to Syme were connections drawn from facial markings:

Regarding the statement to the effect that the Kusasis bear a kind of official mark this is quite incorrect and is evidently prompted by the fact that ever since the advent of Europeans Kusasi children in growing numbers are being given a sort of Mamprusi mark, which is considered more attractive than the very elaborate Kusasi markings and is much easier to perform. Now that the need for everybody to bear a mark by which he is to be recognized has past [sic] the women give their children any mark they fancy. Some give none at all, and a youth can give himself to the operator and instructs [sic] him as to the particular style of beauty which he is to be adorned. 285

Though Syme’s Brief History went unpublished and was of marginal interest to his superiors he did become better acquainted with the Kusasi and even became sympathetic

283 Ibid.

284 Ibid, 8

285 Ibid.
to their positioning under amalgamation. He viewed the Kusasi along evolutionist lines, and felt that their advances made in such a small time frame “from such a primitive stage of development to well-ordered organizations under 19 respective chiefs” was a “triumph.”

Though he was not against amalgamation he did write in 1932 that he hoped the district reshuffling would not disrupt the “fragile balance between Mamprusi and Kusasi.” Above all, he hoped that with the amalgamation officials would “not expect too much” of the Kusasi regarding their relationship with the Mamprusi Bawkunaba. According to Wyatt MacGaffey in his study on chiefs, religion, and land in Northern Ghana, the Kusasi and other stateless groups such as Kasena and Konkomba employed what James C. Scott calls “the art of not being governed.” This may be true, but it could also be argued that peoples of various tribal affiliations in the north-east employed what Scott has termed “weapons of the weak” simply through their everyday negotiation of colonial borders.

286 Kusasi Informal Diary Bawku, February 28th, 1932, 334, NAGA 57/5/1

287 Kusasi Informal Diary Bawku, 334, NAGA 57/5/1

288 Ibid.

289 Wyatt MacGaffey, Chiefs, priests, and praise-singers: history, politics and land ownership in northern Ghana (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), Conclusion.

290 In the context of the north-east, it seems ongoing negotiations of the border constituted everyday transgressions. The effect was less pre-meditated than is implied in the statement “the art of not being governed”. Certainly, stateless groups along the border proved difficult for colonial authorities to ‘order’ and manage, but I hesitate to call their everyday actions a conscious, collective effort. Rather, Scott’s phrase, “weapons of the weak” seems to capture the disparate power struggles of the Kusasi and other groups under a foreign-imposed native administration. James C. Scott, Seeing like a State (New Haven: Yale University, 1998)
4.1 The north-east in colonial imagination

Throughout the colonial period the north-east was an important cattle and trade route and the movement of peoples and goods across the border provided opportunities to subvert colonial authority. With the exception of Lawra district in the north-west, Kusasi had the largest frontier in the North and administrators lamented the porous frontier did not limit the degree to which people could circumvent administrative rule.291

“Everyone”, one observer noted, “passed through Bawku; men from ‘French’ country bringing cattle South; Moshis on bicycles; Hausa traders; Fulani herdsmen; lorries from Tamale and men returning home, bringing luxuries from the Coast.”292 District officers struggled to merely keep-up with the administrative burden of what was viewed as an “enormous floating population.”293 Added to this was the difficulty of managing the exodus and return of male labourers to and from the south. The border acted as a tool for tax evaders; the settling of farm disputes between farmers with competing claims to land straddling the border; and guarding against disease, particularly diseases such as trypanosomiasis - the sleeping sickness - which occurred in both humans and animals and which threatened to wipe-out important live-stock commodities.294

291 Kusasi Informal Diary, 11 September 1932, NAGA 57/5/1
292 Memoirs of Yvonne Fox: MSS. Afr. s. 2084, 33, RHL
293 Kusasi Informal Diary, 10 March 1936, NAGA 57/5/2
The health of trade took precedence over the health of people. Government funds were put toward a mobile, veterinary unit as the improvement of Bawku hospital fell by the wayside. District officials in Bawku noted how north-easterners dealt with these poor facilities by travelling across the border into French territory for treatment.\footnote{Kusasi Informal Diary, 5 January, 1933, 424, NAGA 57/5/2} One of the most important destinations for healthcare was the cercle (district) of Tenkodogo while others seeking healthcare travelled even further northward to Ouagadougou. Though good health facilities existed in the northern border town of Navrongo those in Bawku chose to access medical facilities in French West Africa.

Despite the colonial state’s neglect of health facilities trade facilitated the growth of Bawku over the course of the 1920s. By 1929, officials commented on the number of new compounds springing up everywhere along both roads [to the border crossing] as “perfectly astounding” and Syme called this building boom “visible evidence of the influx of people over the border.”\footnote{Kusasi Informal Diary, 5 April, 1929, NAGA 57/5/1} Bawku building permits started to be issued in 1930 as a result of overcrowding and this increase in building made officials believe Bawku was becoming ‘unwieldy.’ Efforts were put in place to divide town zongos (Muslim communities) more stringently. Sanitary rules were more strictly enforced so that when people built new houses they would know exactly to which zongo they belonged – Moshi, Fulani, Mamprusi, Hausa or Grunshi.\footnote{Ibid., 21 May 21, 1932.} Again, colonial tribal taxonomy served as a first line of defense against issues which threatened disorder.

Economic disorder came to the north-east in the 1930s and as with many towns
across Africa the depression impacted Bawku. Its dense population and overcrowding coupled with plummeting prices in commodities led to an increase in theft. And it was during this time that district informal diaries began to characterize Bawku as ‘lawless’ within the colonial imagination. Syme noted in 1932 that Bawku needed a larger detachment to deal with smuggling of both kola and sheep.\textsuperscript{298} He tried to justify his petition by pointing out that the northern border facilitated smuggling even more than within the southern province [southern province of mandated Togo] because “the type of country is so different there that the routes by which the smuggling can be carried on are limited in the number. Here there is no limit.”\textsuperscript{299} Given the high degree of smuggling documented by Paul Nugent along the southern mandated Togo border one can only imagine the magnitude of smuggling along the north-eastern border corridor.\textsuperscript{300} Again, the placement of Bawku so far away from Accra had much to do with creating the image of smuggling, theft and ‘lawlessness’. A.I. Asiwaju has noted that the distance of the Nigeria and Dahomey (now Benin) border from both seats of power – Porto Novo and Lagos – provided relative autonomy to Yoruba-speaking peoples there, allowing them to manipulate laws to their local advantages. In other words, these borderland peoples had an advantage of relative autonomy.\textsuperscript{301} Much like the Nigeria-Dahomey border, the north-eastern Anglo-French border held a certain “asylum value” for thieves and bandits

\textsuperscript{298} Ibid., February, 1932

\textsuperscript{299} Ibid., 11 September, 1932.

\textsuperscript{300} Nugent, \textit{Smugglers, secessionists & loyal citizens on the Ghana-Togo frontier: the life of the borderlands since 1914.}

with the Pusiga market serving as a refuge for those wanted by colonial authorities on either side. References to notorious thieves are outlined in informal diaries, with one thief being mentioned as successfully evading European authorities for years by fleeing across the border to escape persecution. His name, Yara Moshi, mentioned from the earlier 1920s and into the 1930s, came up periodically, and when he was finally caught, he was found with a talisman in his possession with marks for those from whom he evaded arrest including a notch for the district commissioner.

It is important to remember that the construction of the north-east as lawless influenced the way in which these ‘thieves’ were perceived. For example, oral interviews with the present-day Chief of Binaba in west Kusasi district, Chief Moses Appiah Abarre, suggest that not all reports of theft and smuggling that found their way into colonial informal diaries were really ‘thefts’ at all. European colonial references to crop and cattle stealing refer to a more complex dynamic of the borderlands where groups of

302 In his Brief History of Kusasi, Syme provides a chapter on Pusiga in which he wrote that “nowadays Pusiga Sub-Division is receiving a constant flow of immigrants from French Territory, largely Yangas and Busangas, the result being that less than half the total population is Kusasi. Pusiga itself, from the usual collection of scattered compounds, is becoming quite a village, consisting largely of Hausas”.

303 Kusasi Informal Diary, 12 November 1932, NAGA 57/5/1. The DC writes, “the great thief” Yara Moshi was caught in a house at Pusiga...” Ever since he escaped twice in 1924 he has lived in French country just across from Pusiga and is the bête noir of cattle traders and the Pusiga people”. He was punished with 2 years (in addition to a former sentence of 3 years because he escaped from Tamale jail) as well as 18 lashes and 5 years police supervision.

304 Interview, Chief Moses Appiah Abarre of Binaba. Interviewed in Bolgatanga, Ghana, October 2010. Chief Abarre was also quick to add that not all smuggling was condemned by colonial officials, especially if they saw it as beneficial in terms of revenue.
people negotiated a foreign imposition that cut across kin, land, and tribal affiliation.  

As the Chief explained, groups often played European powers against each other, claiming affiliation to one chief or the other depending upon what was at stake or how it could benefit them. There existed both voluntary and involuntary movement of French subjects into British territory to flee conscription or forced labour and also seasonal relocation because of periodic famines or crop failures. While thefts may have been misconstrued, famines and failed crops were indeed a reality in the north-east. A decade earlier, when crop failure and famine hit, references to half-starved peoples wandering from district to district in search of food appeared in informal diaries. As one official explained of an incident where peoples from Navaro, Zuaragu, and Winninaba [sic] had hoes in their hand, willing to hoe in exchange for sustenance. While this local migration was viewed as a strategy of survival, for some long-distance migration to the south was not an attractive option. Though starving, the mention of work in the south as a relief from famine, wrote one official, was not favorably received. Other strategies for survival included peoples crossing the border and literally buying out produce in the Bawku market, since their crops had failed. The flow of currency across the borderlands

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305 It is interesting to note that included in Syme’s Brief History of Kusasi was a section on Binaba. He says the Kusasis in Binaba had ‘come fairly recently’ and that the Chief of Binaba had “risen from a comparatively unimportant person to a position of some importance”.

306 Archival evidence supports this claim. In the informal diaries there is evidence that officials on both sides of the border realized they were being duped. For example, Syme notes in the fall of 1932 that border disturbances and ‘petty inter-colonial palavers’ with Tenkudugu and Susanemango [sic] were declining, a fact his French counterpart attributes to the “indigenes” realizing they [the administrators] are “d’accord” or in agreement, rather than at odds. Certainly, this was classic ‘divide and rule’, but interestingly not on the part of the administrators. Kusasi Informal Diary, 6 October, 1932, NAGA 57/5/1

307 Kusasi Informal Diary, 26 July 1922, NAGA 57/5/1

308 Ibid.
was also altered by the depression and often there were various currencies flowing across the border with at times an influx of English pennies and half-pennies across the border in Tenkodogu market. Once, an official complained that none would be found in Bawku since they were all going across the border.309

Certainly, the depression worked to remould social and economic exchanges along the borderlands but the image of the north-east as lawless also stemmed from 1920s ethnography that had fashioned the Northern Territories as ‘stateless’ or decentralized. Officials often associated stateless societies as troublesome with particular groups more troublesome than others. Benjamin Talton has described how the Konkomba who resided in and around present-day Yendi were framed in the colonial imagination as troublesome and Sean Hawkins and Carola Lentz have commented on the construction of the Lobi in colonial imagination in the north-west in similar ways.310 The Kusasi were also framed along these lines. The troublesome label was articulated ethnographically in various ways on paper and in photographs and all of this worked to legitimize and justify administrators’ selection of native authorities from the Dagomba, Dagara and Mamprusi. These groups along with others moving back and forth along the border worked to animate the North as difficult to govern in the colonial imagination.

Of the most troublesome groups for officials to handle was one which cut-across tribal lines – that is, women. Numerous cases involving women appear in Kusasi district informal diaries. There is evidence that officials became exasperated with the number of

309 Ibid., 31 March, 1932.

310 See: Talton, Politics of Social Change in Ghana. The Konkomba Struggle for Political Equality, Chapter 2; Lentz, Ethnicity and the making of history in northern Ghana, Chapters 1 & 2 and Hawkins, Writing and colonialism in northern Ghana: the encounter between the LoDagaa and “the world on paper”, Part I.
incidents involving women held in slavery-like conditions. Excerpts from the 1928 informal diary, for example, illustrate the severity and prevalence of offences against women:

April 26th: “I found a woman who appears to have crawled in from Binaba [present-day west Kusasi] in leg irons, but at present I can’t get to the truth of the thing”

April 28th, commenting on the number of women’s palavers upon his return [to the district after travelling]: “they collect like flies if I go away for a few days”

June 30th: “A woman complained of being tied in irons for 4 months. This I know to be true but doubt if I can get any witnesses”

July 4th: “Another young woman complaint of being held in irons and being caught on the road, no young woman can walk alone in this district, but I don’t see much hope of getting any conviction. Tried to deal with 2 witnesses who saw the other woman in irons for 4 months, also with no result”

July 9th: “2 cases of women tied up in leg irons unfortunately though it’s a serious thing in the Ordinance it is not considered so in this district”

July 10th, on completing 2 cases of women tied up and convicted of assault: “By this means the news will get round the district, which is all I want at present”311

Two themes are clear in these excerpts: the irritation with the number of ‘women’s palavers’ and the inability of officials to ascertain witnesses and thus punish the perpetrators. Both the number and difficulty of incidents had much to do with the Northern region being a reserve for male migrant labour. Incidents of ‘violence’ reached their height in the dry season when migrants returned from their work in the south and

311 Informal Diary, Bawku April - July, 1928, NAGA 57/5/1
because agriculturalists were occupied with farming between April and October the dry season was a time to settle disputes.\textsuperscript{312} Sean Hawkins notes how cases of abduction and competition over women in the north-west were often misunderstood by officials who were unable to grasp pre-colonial African approaches to conflict resolution. Competition over women was more a product of economic interdependence than rivalries. Added to this was the fact that administrators were unable to grasp African rhythms of time.\textsuperscript{313}

Regardless of how disputes were misconstrued, these palavers were dealt with such that colonial litigation of conjugal unions was often decided in favour of male migrants.\textsuperscript{314} Likewise, in the north-east, women were sometimes blamed by officials and chastised for being ‘unfaithful’. The inability of colonial administrators to understand “the social boundaries of the people who fell under their jurisdiction” worked to shape colonial narratives of African violence along the borderlands.\textsuperscript{315}

While courts tended to decide in favour of male migrants when it came to incidents related to women and slavery, district officials often blamed corrupt chiefs and headmen. Cases of men ‘logging’ women, for example, often went unpunished for lack of witnesses who would testify and when punishment was handed down it sometimes involved the dismissal of headmen who failed to prevent these offenses from

\begin{flushright}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{312} Hawkins, 180.
\item \textsuperscript{314} Hawkins, 180.
\item \textsuperscript{315} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
occurring.\textsuperscript{316} Here, concerns about corrupt headmen and chiefs in the district caused significant trouble. A diary entry about the town of Tempane noted how even the lowliest headmen there were in possession of large farms, worked by “nothing else but forced labour.” The official writing goes on to say, “…and we say this is not slavery.”\textsuperscript{317}

The corruption and individual accumulation of chiefs was one major reason why officials had sought to reform indirect rule in the 1920s. Under the new framework, chiefs or rather ‘big men’ were made custodians of land rather than land priests or \textit{tindanas} as Rattray suggested. In choosing this framework, the state moved forward with its vision for centralized chieftaincies where chiefs served as the “links between native political structure and native land rights.”\textsuperscript{318} It was clear in the early 1930s that reform had not solved the problem of chiefly corruption especially since chiefs were not always for lack of local legitimacy able to control the actions of those under their jurisdiction. In response to Syme’s request for information on female circumcision, the Bawkunaba explained to Syme that it was the Yangas who were encouraging their women to adopt the practice of clitoridectomy and that many had had the practice performed on them.\textsuperscript{319}

The Secretary of State ordered all administrators and medical officials do everything in their power to discourage the practice. However, the ability for local administrators to ‘do’ anything was predicated on the power and effectiveness of native authorities. Since

\textsuperscript{316} Informal Diary Bawku, 27 September, 1928, NAGA 57/5/1. Unfortunately, I am unable to define what constitutes the ‘logging’ of women in colonial Africa other than it seems to be gendered and was used as a way to punish unfaithful or unruly women in Bawku.

\textsuperscript{317} Ibid., July 22, 1928.

\textsuperscript{318} Lund, \textit{Local Politics and the Dynamics of Property in Africa}, 21. See also, Chapter 3, 47-67.

\textsuperscript{319} Kusasi Informal Diary, 5 January, 1933, NAGA 57/5/2
the paramount native authority in the north-east was drawn from the Mamprusi chieftaincy, this meant imposing Mamprusi over Kusasi, Busanga and Yanga peoples who inhabited both sides of the border. After meeting with the Chief of Bawku (Bawkunaba) in early January 1933, Syme noted the increasing prevalence of cutting in Bawku:

I find that certain Kusasis who live near the Yangas have been encouraging their women to adopt clitoridectomy and several have had excision performed on them this year. The Chief says he is against it, and states that though it would be difficult to dissuade Yangas and Busangas from observing the custom, he does not propose to let it get a hold among the Kusasis and local Mamprussis.  

Evidence of the practice spreading among the Kusasi points to how poorly native authority was functioning in the north-east post amalgamation. Though officials sought to manage the practice along tribal lines the ethnic composition of the north-east combined with Mamprusi rule to make this goal difficult to attain. The adoption of female circumcision practices among non-practicing groups prevented officials from using tribal taxonomy to suppress the practice; unable to manage the practices, the Mamprusi Bawkunaba blamed the influence of ‘outsider’ groups. Yanga and Busanga peoples inhabited both sides of the border much like the Kusasi. But Syme was unable to determine the reason for adoption of the practices. He reported that he made enquiries among elders, but lamented, “I have never been able to find out the reason for this operation, and even men whose women have subjected themselves [sic] to it are

320 J.K. G. Syme, Assistant. District Commissioner, *Bawku Informal Diary*, Mamprusi District, 5 January 1933, NAGA 57/5/1

321 ‘Busanga’ may itself be a misnomer since in French language texts the closest-sounding group are the Busanse.
apparently unable to enlighten me.” Rather, the elders focused on its perpetuation by women arguing that males offered no compulsion on their part. Both male district commissioner and male elders found common ground for cooperation with government in a “determined effort to suppress it.” The surgeons, claimed the Bawkunaba, were the “skilled operators” and thus the proper people to “get at.” Here, chief and officials collaborated against the two most ‘troublesome’ groups in the north-east: ‘outsiders’ from among the enormous floating population and women who were portrayed as sole the perpetuators of the practice. Xenophobia and gender come together to position women as a deviant group residing along the ‘lawless’ north-eastern borderland.

322 ‘Clitoridectomy’, Syme, Asst. District Commissioner, District Commissioner’s Office, Kusasi District, Bawku, Northern Territories to Chief Commissioner’s Office, Tamale, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933. *Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3*, NAGT 3
4.2 Cameron: a Tanganyika Model of indirect rule

Debates concerning indirect rule reform in Northern Territories in the 1930s centered on the question of acephelous or so-called stateless societies and the assumption that reforms should make governing them easier. But in *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, Rattray expressed his support for a system that was unique to the region and not a cookie-cutter version of Northern Nigeria. "We have a fine chance here in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, with its really first-class human material and interesting
existing constitution, to produce a native Administration which will be a model to other territories.”³²³ Critics including anthropologist M.J. Field had already pointed out the difficulties in replicating the Northern Nigerian model among so-called stateless societies.³²⁴ And while certain states in the North such as Dagomba, Gonja and Mamprusi were viewed as similar to emirates in Northern Nigeria, the remainder of the Northern Territories lacked the same political power base and tax structure. The relative statelessness of the Northern Territories was judged to be too ‘democratic’ to replicate the Nigerian model without significant problems.³²⁵ Rather than create a unique model as Rattray advised, officials gravitated toward Cameron’s model of indirect rule among the stateless societies using Tanganyika as a template. John Iliffe has noted that under Cameron’s vision for indirect rule, Tanganyika fell into line with interwar British practices in Africa, but was unique because it was a former German colony. In then German East Africa, ecological disasters combined with the prevalence of uprisings such as the infamous Maji Maji rebellion (1905-7) led the British to believe that the Germans had done much to destroy pre-colonial social organization in Tanganyika.³²⁶ As such, the aim for officials implementing indirect rule there was different than in Northern Nigeria: “Consequently indirect rule did not mean incorporating existing institutions into the

³²³ Rattray, Tribes, xxii.


³²⁵ Grischow, 89

³²⁶ The Maji Maji rebellion was unique in the sense that it spread widely among stateless peoples. This is an extremely important point when considering the application of Cameron’s policies in so-called ‘stateless’ or ‘decentralized’ Northern Ghana.
colonial structure – as Lugard had done in Northern Nigeria – but reconstructing the institutions existing before the disaster of German rule.\textsuperscript{327}

This is similar to the goal in Northern Territories in that the North was viewed by officials as being disrupted by slave trade as it occupied a belt raided by slave traders. In Tanganyika and the Northern Territories there existed a shared goal of re-setting Africans’ development through reforming of native authority. Central to Cameron’s model was the idea of amalgamation of tribes into larger federations. Between 1925 and 1931, he worked to amalgamate tribes into units which would over time evolve into nations. At the heart of this was the idea of federation: federating settlements under chief’s councils rather than under paramount chiefs.\textsuperscript{328} This district system had been touched upon in Lugard’s \textit{Dual Mandate}, but was discussed as an alternative to the indirect rule system put in place under his governorship in Northern Nigeria. Cameron’s ideas to increase the efficiency of indirect rule administration (outlined later in his 1935 work, \textit{The Principles of Indirect Rule}) were beginning to attract attention which would eventually set him apart from Lugard as an engineer of ‘native policy. By 1932, Margery Perham would remark that “Cameron’s reforms had caught the imagination of almost all qualified observers.”\textsuperscript{329} However, not all favoured Cameron’s model. Jeff Grischow notes the Colonial office took issue with Cameron’s model for several reasons and Cameron

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{327} Iliffe, 322.
\textsuperscript{328} Grischow, 90
\textsuperscript{329} Draft Letter from Margery Perham to Donald Cameron, 1932, \textit{Mss. Perham} 395/1/1-16, RHL. His reforms were meant to improve central and district government efficiency so that native authority could function effectively even in areas where it was merely the result of a British creation of what was imagined to be traditional authority.
\end{quote}
himself acknowledged that the system was making chiefs autocratic and corrupt to the extent that state might be forced to solidify its support through direct control. After much discussion, the Colonial Office allowed the Tanganyikan model to be implemented in the Northern Territories along with direct taxation. Over the next five years 1930-1935, northern tribes were amalgamated into Native Authorities. For the north-east, this meant that by 1932 Southern Mamprusi, Kusasi, Zuarungu and Navrongo were amalgamated into one Mamprusi District with the Mamprusi chief – nayiri – at its head with headquarters at Gambaga.

While Cameron’s version differed from Lugard’s, both shared a hesitation toward aggressive legal reform. Rather than focus on European legislation as a tool for re-structuring indirect rule, Cameron emphasized the “necessity of recognizing viable African governmental institutions.” As Governor of Tanganyika, Cameron showed little interest in legislation as a tool for re-organizing Tanganyika’s native administration. This hesitation toward European legislation is outlined in detail in the pamphlet commissioned by him and authored by Sir Philip Mitchell.

330 Grischow, 90


333 Ibid., 67-86.

334 Mitchell was an important collaborator in revising Lugard’s political memoranda for issue to administrators called ‘little brown books’. As Gailey explains, once the ‘little brown books’ on native authority were issued they became “the bible of administration practice for junior officers”. The success of the little brown books was so great that they were reprinted for us in Nigeria and also issued to officers in the Gambia. Ibid., 69.
Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory’, he favours what he calls ‘The inevitability of gradualness.’

4.3 Cameron’s pamphlet: Female Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory

The pamphlet on female circumcision and the status of women in Tanganyika territory deals specifically with the question of women within the framework of reforming native authority. It was sent to the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories in 1931 – the same year Cameron left Tanganyika to become Governor of Nigeria. The pamphlet positions female circumcision and initiation as an important tribal institution and focuses singly on the question of women and indirect rule reform. Though Cameron circulated much of his political memoranda throughout Africa, it is one of his few pieces providing general instructions to district officials about how to deal with women and issues related to women.

Much of the pamphlet criticizes Governor Grigg’s handling of the female circumcision controversy in Kenya from 1928-31. Rather than legislation, Cameron argued: “time and great patience are needed and a realization that attempts at coercion and isolated prohibitions will inevitably cause a revulsion against our culture and our religion and a disposition to reject our help which had indeed already made its appearance in the form of what are known as separate churches [in Kenya].”

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335 Cameron to Lord Passfield, 22 May 1930, Status of Native Women and Children - Customs Affecting, 1929-1930, TNA U.K., 323/1067/2

336 Secretary for Native Affairs to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 2 June, 1931, “Female Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory,” Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3, NAGT 3.
sense, this was a natural extension of Cameron’s earlier attempts to discredit Grigg on the issue of closer union in East Africa. Following the League of Nations Mandate which ceded Tanganyika to Britain in 1924 Cameron began to argue against those campaigning for the territory’s closer union with Kenya. Cameron believed that closer union would bring Tanganyika more within the sphere of settler interests. The question came down to land and labour; Grigg was in favour of further coercion of Africans to work on settler farms. Cameron disagreed and felt that labour coercion in Tanganyika would undermine his reform of native authority and generally derail his gradualist plan for native development. In opposing closer union, Cameron, along with Mitchell, issued a series of dispatches to the Colonial Office. To Cameron, the female circumcision controversy in 1928-1931 was but one example of Grigg bowing to European interests.

Cameron felt strongly that officials’ initial desire to Europeanize Africans had backfired. Part of this was due to his subjectivity – Cameron was a West Indian creole. Iliffe believes this made him more endeared to the period’s (1920s) “widespread skepticism of the desirability of assimilating non-Europeans to European culture.” It is no surprise then that in the pamphlet he expressed relief with what he felt was the recent turn toward preserving African tradition. “Modern opinion is tending more and more to the view that it is not only impossible to Europeanize Africans and to substitute an alien legal and social system, but that it is a thing to be carefully avoided”. He cites an

337 Gailey, xi.

338 Iliffe, 320.

339 Secretary for Native Affairs to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 2 June, 1931, “Female Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory,” Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3, NAGT 3
excerpt from the London Missionary Society from sixty years before as an example of the
correct mentality espoused by the society’s members working then in South Africa:

Do not anglicise your converts. Remember that the people
are foreigners. Let them continue as such. Let their foreign
individuality be maintained. Build upon it, so far as it its
good and sound, and Christianize, but do not needlessly
change it. Do not seek to make the people Englishmen.
Seek to mould a pure, refined, and Christian character,
native to the soil.340

This fear of Europeanization facilitated fears about detribalization. At the heart of this
was the question of imposing English law on Africa. Cameron viewed the desire by some
in Kenya and England to legislate against female circumcision as simplistic, if not
harmful.

Those of us who spend our lives in the administration of
Africans would be indeed glad if the facile expedient of
prohibition which is so often urged upon us as the way to
deal with the objectionable aspect of primitive society were
in fact a weapon capable of effective use. If the African
could be civilised by alien legislation, most of our own
difficulties would cease; but civilisation is the cause and
not the effect of improvements in law.341

At the core of his position on legislation was the question of individual versus community
rights. During his tenure in Tanganyika, Cameron was vehemently opposed to
introducing any sort of Western-style democracy.342 He believed that English political
institutions could not be used as templates for native authority reforms as they would lead

340 Secretary for Native Affairs to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 2 June, 1931, “Female
Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory,” Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3,
NAGT 3

341 In fact, Tanganyika’s response to Atholl’s enquiry had to be edited to remove his criticisms of Governor
Grigg and his handling of the ‘female circumcision controversy’ there.

342 Gailey, 85.
to anarchy and political destabilization as in India. Moreover, he did not believe the import of these institutions would work to benefit the African individual.\(^{343}\) This is made clear when in the pamphlet he warns about what would happen if legislation were instituted against female circumcision. If tribal institutions were destroyed, Africans would have to “find others to discharge the functions which tribal institutions now discharge, including the whole of the law of personal status and relationship, ownership of property, tenure of land, and inheritance.”\(^{344}\) Playing upon officials’ fears of detribalization, he went on to stress how uninitiated girls would be considered unclean, and would therefore have to seek husbands outside their tribe – possibly a Europeanised husband – or live as concubines: “In any case, they feel the girl is lost to them and has gone over to the Europeans. To them it must appear as a deliberate attack on their ancient customs.”\(^{345}\) Again, Cameron believed that if legislation was implemented the girls would find no reprieve from what was referred to as their “victimhood.” In other words, though Cameron and Mitchell did not celebrate the existence of female circumcision practices they did not believe European legislation would be of any benefit to the female ‘individual’. Difficulties surrounding evidence, witnesses and punishment would complicate the whole process for administrators.\(^{346}\) “The girl could never return to her own people and would have to receive the protection of the government, which would

\(^{343}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{344}\) Secretary for Native Affairs to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 2 June, 1931, “Female Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory,” Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3, NAGT 3

\(^{345}\) Ibid.

\(^{346}\) Ibid.
have to provide for the girl’s future in a mission or a hospital." This mention of girl’s education serves as a threat and a justification for not introducing legislation against the practice. Rather than emancipate the girl, legislation would isolate her from her community. She would be ostracized and displaced and it would become the responsibility of the colonial state to provide for her education. This was counter to Cameron’s desire to defend against the negative impact of too rapid development.

To a people regarding with amazement and fear an alien civilisation and economy developing at breakneck speed all around them, their old tribal institutions must appear as their last refuge and support and when they conceive the idea that the Europeans propose to assail those at the most vital point, they naturally become deeply disturbed.348

It was feared that stripping Africans from their tribal institutions would lead to a breakdown in values. As Iliffe points out, Cameron’s skepticism of Europeanization and desire to preserve all that was good in African societies was buttressed by a ‘post-war despair with European values.’349 This post-war despair is even evident in the memoirs of one of the few European women in the Northern Territories who lived in Bawku in 1919. Yvonne Fox, wife of a district officer, noted that when she arrived in Bawku she was a self-proclaimed ‘women’s lib’er’ and felt troubled when she saw women bearing heavy loads on their backs.350 But after living in Africa for some time, her position on the status of women began to change.

347 Ibid.
348 Ibid.
349 Iliffe, 320.
350 Memoirs of Yvonne Fox: MSS. Afr. s. 2084, 62-63, RHL Describing her original ‘beasts of burden’ outlook on women in the North, Yvonne Fox explains: "...if I had mounted a soap box in the market
I learned that these women had no conception of the inferiority of their position and having no sociologists to make them aware of their restricted lives, they were not bothered...I began to realise that any change in the social system would be very gradual and though I consoled myself with the thought that education, the tractor and Christianity would accelerate the movement towards monogamy and an improvement in the position of women, in my heart of hearts, I wondered if they would be any happier.\textsuperscript{351}

The despair evident in even the memoirs of a British feminist helps to illustrate the tendency for male officials to defend female circumcision by comparing it to long-outdated European traditions. This is illustrated in a letter to the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, where a district commissioner in the north-east cites an extract from an article in the \textit{British Medical Journal} which he thinks throws light on the origins of clitoridectomy:

\begin{quotation}
It has long been recognized that the Couvade is of this nature – that custom, spread widely in Europe, by which the father goes to bed and groans as when the child is being born, thereby demonstrating that he also is a parent of the child. I suggest that circumcision may also be a member of this group of customs. Fitness for reproduction is indicated by menstruation and it is conceivable that an effusion or blood from the genitals would be extended to the man also as a proof of fitness for parenthood, and the introduction of female circumcision as a later extension after the original meaning of the rite was forgotten.\textsuperscript{352}
\end{quotation}

square in Hyde Park fashion and cried out "Women, look to your liberty", I should have had no more success than a certain kindly English woman who was so outraged by this sweating of female labour that she promptly ordered a number of wheelbarrows from England and presented them to certain women in her district who, in order to satisfy the whim of the donor, placed their goods in the barrows and carried all on top of their heads.\textsuperscript{351}

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{352} ‘Clitoridectomy’, Syme, Asst. District Commissioner, District Commissioner’s Office, Kusasi District, Bawku, Northern Territories to Chief Commissioner’s Office, Tamale, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933. \textit{Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3}, NAGT 3
Comparisons between African practices and former European traditions were common in Northern Ghana and influenced the way officials viewed the practices. In his work on the north-west, Sean Hawkins has stated officials held a ‘cultural relativistic’ stance toward female circumcision.\footnote{Hawkins, 125.} Rather than refer to this perspective as cultural relativism, it may be more productive to consider it as part of the larger despair with European values and fears about detribalization mentioned by Iliffe. African tribal organization would be preserved with its own laws and customs and ‘purged of anything that is repugnant to justice and morality.’\footnote{Iliffe, 322.} In this way, likening female circumcision in Africa to old European traditions served to justify its gradual ‘dying-out’ and distance the practices from being considered ‘repugnant to justice and morality.’ Proving an African practice or law was not repugnant was imperative for those arguing against legislation seeing as how in India, the practice of ‘suttee’ [sati] had been legislated against. Activists in favour of legislating against female circumcision were making these comparisons with sati and Cameron and Mitchell used the pamphlet to respond to connections drawn between the actions of the British Government in India in the case of ‘suttee,’ which they felt was “by no means a good analogy”:

That a woman has been burned to death and that certain persons were present or connived at the attendant ceremony is a matter which, by its nature, is normally capable of definite proof, and, therefore, of appropriate punishment. That the genital organs of a woman have suffered some mutilation, perhaps internal, could only be established by a medical examination of the few who had the courage to complain; how few they would be, after the first successful
prosecution I leave to the imagination of those who know Africa.\textsuperscript{355}

Cameron’s assumptions about African tribal institutions and what constituted ‘community’ worked to frame female circumcision as important to the survival of the tribe. Rather than focus on attacking the tribe for perpetuating female circumcision, the pamphlet attacks the individuals who practice within the tribe as being the problem:

\begin{quote}
It is unreasonable to ascribe the depravity of individuals to the tribal system as it would be to ascribe prostitution to the Common Law of England, or the abomination of the inquisition to the Christian faith. From time immemorial the tribal system has met the needs of the people, and in their new and alarming contacts with western civilization it can still meet those needs and serve as a stabilizing influence in all the perplexities which surround the African of today. With sympathetic help and guidance from his teachers, [sic] it is capable of development as the background of a Christian and civilized society.\textsuperscript{356}
\end{quote}

In comparing the practices to European customs which gradually died-out over time, the pamphlet creates the illusion that administrators were practicing some sort of cultural relativism. “[T]he practice,” argues a Northern Territories commissioner, “raises a very large question as to what is detrimental to the health and well-being of the people [...] many African customs would be detrimental to a European but apparently not so to the African.”\textsuperscript{357} This was not cultural relativism. It was about the maintenance of racialized difference and the refusal of officials to legislatively interfere with an issue connected to

\textsuperscript{355} Secretary for Native Affairs to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 2 June, 1931, “Female Circumcision and the Status of Women in Tanganyika Territory,” \textit{Female Excision (Circumcision)}, 1930-3, NAGT 3

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{357} Commissioner, Northern Province to Chief Commissioner, Tamale, 10 June, 1930, \textit{Female Excision (Circumcision)}, 1930-33, NAGT 3,
other undesirable practices tied to the ‘tribe.’ As explained by the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, administrators would also have to legislate against other forms of cutting such as scarification and other tribal markings, “since tribal markings and female circumcision are seen as equal in the European mind.”\footnote{358}

4.4 Applying the Tanganyika Pamphlet: Social Education and Propaganda

Female circumcision was viewed as a tribal practice and officials sought to preserve as much of the initiation practice as possible. The first step was to determine what should be ignored and what should be discarded. Officials decided that the so-called milder form should be preserved. Through Rattray’s work and the writings of district officials the milder form became categorized as that which was performed at infancy. It was viewed by officials as less severe because it was thought that since it was performed at infancy it was “possibly less dangerous.”\footnote{359} In focussing on the age of cutting, officials’ categorization of mild and severe was not primarily dictated by the manner or extent of the cutting. In Sudan, officials had distinguished the most severe form of cutting as infibulation (the cutting and sewing of the labia) from female circumcision or clitoridectomy. It seems this distinction was less important in Northern Ghana. Infibulation did not occur in the North, though cutting beyond the simple excision of the clitoris did. Rattray made note of this in his own fieldwork where he mentions select tribes in the north-east as performing what he viewed to be the more severe form – that is beyond simple excision of clitoris and done in puberty. Rattray distinguished mild from severe both through the manner of cutting and age of cutting and it is important here to

\footnote{358}{Ibid.}

\footnote{359}{Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930, TNA U.K., CO 323 1067/1}
discuss the reasons why age, rather than manner, was of concern to officials.

When done at infancy, it was believed there would be fewer medical and reproductive side-effects. The intersection of reproduction and age is important. Lynn Thomas found that in the Meru region of Kenya colonial officials actually encouraged that the practice of female circumcision be done at a younger age. There, among the Meru, it was performed as a puberty rite. However, officials in the area had grown concerned about the number of abortions occurring. It was discovered that the abortions were due to uninitiated girls engaging in sexual intercourse and becoming pregnant.

Since these girls had not yet reached the appropriate age for initiation – which included female circumcision – they were still viewed as girls within their communities. They were not yet women and thus were not considered fit for childbirth. If the children were delivered, they would curse the community. As a result, these uninitiated girls underwent abortions. Since officials were concerned about the number of abortions and the effect these abortions had on the reproductive capacities of the girls, their communities, and labour, they began to actively encourage female circumcision to take place at a younger age than previously performed. This was an attempt to preserve circumcision in a form they felt was more beneficial to the tribal group and its development.

360 Ibid.
362 Ibid. See also: Lynn Thomas, “Gendered reproduction: placing schoolgirl pregnancies in African history”, in Africa After Gender
Thomas’ work points to the ways in which concerns surrounding reproduction were really about how the tribe was viewed within colonial policy. As Nancy Rose Hunt points out, these were expressly ‘gendered reproductive’ concerns. However, they were gendered concerns that were part of the tribal group. The gendered reproduction within the tribal group was of prime importance. In Northern Ghana, this meant concerns about the age of cutting had much to do with which tribal groups performed the procedures. The tribes in the north-west who practiced the form conducted at infancy (the “possibly less dangerous” milder form) and singled-out as models. Of particular note was the mild form practiced by the ‘Wala’. Officials believed their form was closer to that of male circumcision, with less publicity of the operation and less chance of malformation and septicemia to develop. The Wala model was viewed as mild because of the manner of cutting and because it was done in infancy. Also it was noted that at the same time these operations are carried out, Wala tribal marks were cut into the face, body, legs and arms of the infants of both sex. Officials observed that those Dagarti and Issala tribes that also resided in Wa were described as following the ‘Wala custom’ but did not perform it in infancy. This slight difference led officials to believe that if the practice could be encouraged in infancy all three groups would be practicing the same; all would perform what officials regarded as the mild form. In contrast, it was found that the one


364 *Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930*, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

365 Arden, District commissioner’s Office, Wa, to Acting Chief Commissioner, Tamale, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933, *Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930*, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

366 Ibid.
tribe in the north-west which did not circumcise in the Wala custom was the Lobi. Officials compared the Lobi form as similar to the Nankanna in the north-east who also performed the cutting as a puberty rite.\textsuperscript{367}

This view of the ‘Wala custom’ had much to do with native authority and tribal taxonomy in the north-west. Officials explained the reason for Dagarti and Issala tribes performing the mild form as an indicator of their tendency to follow ‘Wala’ custom.\textsuperscript{368}

As in the north-east, this explanation was also about how officials imagined the north-west. Following Samory Touré’s capture of Wa in 1896, the British invaded Kumasi, moved into Gambaga in the North and used it for a base to attack Touré’s troops. Wa was captured in 1897 by the British and a treaty was drawn up between the Wa Na (chief of Wa) which secured trade and protection and positioned him as ‘King of Dagarti.’\textsuperscript{369} Over the next few decades, the British sought to position the Wa Na as leader over the Dagarti and Lobi to the north when in reality, the tribal categories of Lobi, Dagarti and Issala were themselves colonial constructions and Dargarti and Lobi did not form distinct ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{370} Nevertheless, officials such as Northcott chose to believe in two broad tribal categories which were under the Wa polity prior to Touré’s conquest: Lobi and Dagarti. The categories were useful in a colonial context insofar as they became associated with levels of civilization. To the British, the Lobi were the least advanced and “became the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{367} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{368} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{369} Grischow, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{370} Ibid., 40.
\end{itemize}
main target for British pacification.”371 The observation that the Lobi did not practice the ‘Wala custom’ was thus significant. Rather than perform the mild form, the Lobi were described as performing the more severe practice as found among the Nankanna of the north-east. 372 This observation says more about colonial tribal taxonomies than it does about ethnicity and female circumcision. Indeed, the question of which groups performed mild or severe forms in Northern Ghana had much to do with tribal taxonomies and indirect rule.

Propaganda efforts focused on convincing groups to adopt the milder form of female circumcision and officials believed this could be accomplished through native authorities. In the north-west this meant educating tribal groups to follow the ‘Wala custom’ while in the north-east, this meant observing Mamprusi authority; while in the north-west, the seat of authority in Wa practiced female circumcision the Mamprusi in the north-east did not. Rather than encourage the milder practice, authorities focussed on the ability of native authorities to convince neighboring groups under Mamprusi jurisdiction to abandon the practice. It was hoped that non-practicing women, particularly those of the dominant Mamprusi chieftaincy headed by the Nyeri would persuade their neighbours to stop voluntarily.373 Again, this focus on both Wa and Mamprusi reflected colonial power structures in the North. Just as in Wa, officials believed the Mamprusi had controlled the ‘decentralized’ communities in the north-east before the slave raids of the

371 Ibid.

372 Arden, District commissioner’s Office, Wa, to Acting Chief Commissioner, Tamale, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933, Status of Native Women and Children - Native Customs Affecting, 1929-1930, TNA U.K., CO 323/1067/1

373 J.K. G. Syme, Assistant. District Commissioner, Bawku Informal Diary, NAGA 57/5/1
19th century.\textsuperscript{374} Since the Dagarti and Issala had adopted the Wala custom in Wa it was not difficult to believe that with further exposure to Mamprusi influence practicing groups in the north-east would follow suit and gradually abandon the practice.

Rattray had believed officials had got it wrong. In his opinion, earth-priests were the natural rulers. However, neither Rattray nor policy-makers questioned the gendered aspects of this power. It was taken for granted that chiefs could act as native authorities and carry out the business of indirect rule. Few had questioned whether this male ethos of indirect rule would be effective in tackling questions related to women. Margery Perham, a theorist of indirect rule herself, was one of the first to do so. Following the Igbo Women’s War, Perham set out to understand how women’s unrest could be prevented. Specifically she asked whether there was a role for women in indirect rule and in the knowledge collection needed for its implementation. In her follow-up letter to Cameron she says that she felt the Aba riots had changed how male administrators would deal with subsequent women’s issues and unrest. Specifically, she felt the overwhelmingly male ethos of indirect rule worked to put distance between colonizer and colonized. This was exemplified in Kenya, where she wrote that the actions of male administrators facilitated rumours among the Kikuyu that Europeans intended to abolish female circumcision in order to steal women and land.\textsuperscript{375} In speaking directly with the leaders of the Aba riots in Nigeria, Perham became convinced that African women would disclose more information to women officials then men (in fact, the leaders of the unrest believed she was sent by the government to champion their cause). At the close of her letter to Cameron she

\textsuperscript{374} Grischow, 21.

\textsuperscript{375} Draft letter from Margery Perham to Donald Cameron, 1932, Mss. Perham 395/1/1-16., RHL
concluded that in the implementation of indirect rule “femininity need not be a handicap in official relations.” Officials in Northern Ghana disagreed. Eyre-Smith, who had worked closely with Rattray, firmly believed that simple exposure to non-practicing groups would solve the problem of female circumcision. Given the fluid movement of people over the borderlands, “there will invariably be women of some clan or clans who do not practice this custom living among clans who do, and their influence will be far greater [than that of propaganda of a woman Medical Officer] in putting a stop to the practice.” Though Syme had requested that women medical officers be incorporated in order to carry out propaganda among practicing groups in the north-east, he was vetoed. To most of his colleagues the mere suggestion of women taking active roles in official relations was judged “undesirable and politically dangerous.” In Northern Ghana, propaganda efforts would remain for the time being a male initiative. This would not change until after independence.

376 Ibid.

377 Female Excision (Circumcision), NAGT 8/2/34. Captain Eyre Smith. Yet, while this is probably smoke and mirrors there is some evidence to suggest that women ‘strangers’ marrying into outside families along the borderlands strengthened bonds between both home units. Ann Cassiman looks at the movement of Kasena wives into their new husband’s household, arguing that while they slowly become full members in the house they also remain a member of their father’s household. Cassiman stresses women’s roles in setting-up and maintaining bonds between previously unconnected groups and households. Ann Cassiman, “‘A woman is someone’s child’: Women and Social and Domestic Space among the Kasena”, in Bonds and Boundaries in Northern Ghana and Southern Burkina Faso eds. Sten Hagberg & Alexis B. Tengen (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology 30, 2000), 105-132.

378 ‘Clitoridectomy’, Syme, Asst. District Commissioner, District Commissioner’s Office, Kusasi District, Bawku, Northern Territories to Chief Commissioner’s Office, Tamale, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933 and Letter from District Commissioner’s Office, Bawku to Chief Commissioner, Tamale, 18 March, 1933, , Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3, NAGT 3
4.5 ‘Drastic measures’: the direct violence of indirect rule

Despite the Bawkunaba’s assurances that he would intervene to stop the spread of the practice amongst Kusasi – perhaps even taking action against the skilled operators of the region – he readily admitted that he would be unable to control the actions of the two groups so important to containing the issue.³⁷⁹ Though Syme had been directed to work through native authorities it was unclear for him as to what should happen if the Bawkunaba could not carry-out his directives. As Iliffe notes of the role of district officials within indirect rule “The European officer’s normal role was to supervise and educate, but if necessary he could issue orders to the administration.”³⁸⁰ The Gold Coast government had been clear that the line of protocol was for district officials to “do everything in their power to suppress the practice.”³⁸¹ But this suppression was meant to be limited to propaganda, education and generally the ability of chiefs to convince those under their jurisdiction to give it up. The Bawkunaba’s admission that he could not control the activities of the Busanga, Yanga and Kusasi groups demonstrates the weaknesses of indirect rule. But these problems were not limited to Northern Ghana. By the 1930s, indirect rule theorists had begun to lament that throughout Africa too much pressure had been placed upon chiefs and there was a general feeling that administrators should not expect so much of their influence. Margery Perham noted that even the most

³⁷⁹ Secretary of Native Affairs, Accra, to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 18 March, 1933, Female Excision (Circumcision), NAGT 8/2/34

³⁸⁰ Iliffe, 320.

³⁸¹ Secretary of Native Affairs, Accra, to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories, 23 July, 1931, Female Excision (Circumcision), NAGT 8/2/34
informed government had to understand that chiefs were sometimes unable to enforce Ordinances:

In order to induce him to use his authority we must rely, more or less, consciously, upon the hold we have over him through his dependence upon us for his position and salary. He, on his part, must endeavour not to train an authority which at the very moment is being undermined as a result of our influence. The old authority of the chieftainship, in fact, tends to drain away from below while we pour in our new authority from above.\(^\text{382}\)

As John Iliffe noted, the expectations placed upon chiefs in Tanganyika – and the frustrations felt by administrators when they were not carried out – revealed the true violence of indirect means:

Officials came to assume that a native authority could order its subjects to do anything. By the late 1930s native authorities, instructed by European ‘advisors’, were ordering men to quit homes in the interests of soil conservation, to destroy herds in the interests of balanced stock-keeping, to uproot coffee trees in the interests of improved husbandry. Behind the whole structure, latent and rarely visible, was the underlying violence of colonial government.\(^\text{383}\)

The violence could be seen in the threats Syme expressed after finding out about the Bawkunaba’s inability to stop the practice from spreading. At that point, he delivered a carrot-and-stick ultimatum.

I intimated with the Chief that Government regarded clitoridectomy with considerable disapproval and that they look to the Chiefs to assist in stamping it out. Failing their cooperation Government might be compelled to take drastic measures on its own. The Chief assured me of his

\(^{382}\) Indirect Rule: Some Problems of Indirect Rule in Africa by Margery Perham, 1934, Mss. 688.2.28, RHL

\(^{383}\) Iliffe, 326.
cooperation and stated that he had no intention of letting the practice spread into Kusasi [district]. He contemplates taking action against the Surgeons, and I have told him that results obtained by him in this, or other ways, will be preferable to the alternative of direct action by Government.\textsuperscript{384}

The archive does not mention what Syme meant by ‘drastic measures.’ but the threat of direct action itself is indicative of the failures of indirect rule. The fear of officials resorting to the use of direct force is precisely what Cameron had himself warned about in his assessment of his tenure in Tanganyika. He felt the effectiveness of amalgamation or federation was completely predicated upon the ability for the chiefs to hold the popular support of the people. If that support was not there, the colonial state would be forced to use direct means. Direct means had been used in the past to collect taxes, conscript soldiers, and complete public building projects.\textsuperscript{385} But it is difficult to speculate what ‘direct means’ would look like when applied to the question of women and female circumcision. If district officials in the north-east could not prevent incidents such as ‘logging’ and placing women in leg irons, then how short of introducing legislation could they influence gendered initiation practices?

While it is difficult to ascertain whether the Mamprusi Chief of Bawku held the popular support of borderland peoples it is clear that colonial borders did affect power

\textsuperscript{384} ‘Clitoridectomy’, Syme, Asst. District Commissioner, District Commissioner’s Office, Kusasi District, Bawku, Northern Territories to Chief Commissioner’s Office, Tamale, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933 and Letter from District Commissioner’s Office, Bawku to Chief Commissioner, Tamale, 18 March, 1933, Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-3, NAGT 3

\textsuperscript{385} Here, I am referring to 1923-1927, when Guggisburg favoured the application of Henry George’s single-tax theories to the Northern Territories. The plan led to a revival of forced recruitment between 1921 and 1924. Chiefs were pressured to recruit migrant labour for the mines and public words. This in turn led to increased accusations of chiefly corruption.
relations between groups. Sean Hawkins has noted that in the north-west, conjugal unions were redefined through the colonial imposed settlements. In the 1920s, the LoBirifor migrated across the Black Volta to the boundaries of Gonja. While they often resisted the jurisdiction of Gonja chiefs they sometimes took advantage of their chiefly powers to settle conflicts pertaining to the competition for wives. Hawkins argues that these tactics were employed by the LoBirifor immigrants out of a male consensus – LoDagaa included – that is was becoming increasingly difficult to exercise coercive power over women.\footnote{Hawkins, 184.} The ability for a chief to settle conjugal disputes varied from settlement to settlement, but the shared desire to control women amidst shifting gender and age relations seemed to facilitate cooperation. Of course, the post-war incorporation of Busanga and Yanga peoples into British jurisdiction makes it difficult to ascertain whether, even with this shared desire, the Bawkunaba would have had the ability to influence these two groups. In the follow-up memorandum to the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, Syme had explained that in Kusasi the practice prevailed amongst the Moshis, Busangas, and Yangas, but not among the Kusasis themselves “except in isolated cases where they have been influenced by outsiders.”\footnote{‘Clitoridectomy’, District Commissioner’s Office, Kusasi District, Bawku, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933, \textit{Female Excision (Circumcision), 1930-33}, NAGT 3} Clearly, Eyre-Smith’s belief that simple exposure to non-practicing groups would facilitate abandonment of the practice altogether had backfired. Instead, it seems that exposure to ‘outsider’ groups had encouraged its spread among the Kusasi. But what did ‘outsider’ mean in the context of indirect rule within the north-east? And why would Kusasi begin to adopt the practice now? As Grischow notes,
“...arguments based on tribal affiliation became popular not only among subjects seeking to contest chiefly authority, but also among chiefs vying with each other for authority over certain groups of subjects.” The playing off of one tribal group over another filtered into all aspects of societies. The Bawkunaba’s framing of practicing groups as ‘outsiders’ positioned the problem of female circumcision outside of British jurisdiction (and outside of his responsibility) and thus outside of the parameters of legislation.

Another aspect influencing these concerns is intra-tribal differences. In present-day Bawku district, Kusasi peoples reside in east and west Bawku. East Bawku Kusasis reside in and around the town of Bawku where Kusasi-Mamprusi tensions continue to influence local politics. Those Kusasi residing in the West Bawku town of Binaba emphasize a difference between themselves and Kusasis in Bawku. Often, women in Binaba referred to Kusasi women in Bawku as practicing female circumcision. This point was embedded in a larger West Kusasi view of Kusasi women in Bawku as backward. These preliminary interviews point to differentiation within the Kusasi ‘tribal’ categorization that colonial administrators – with the exception of Syme – believed to be homogeneous. Binaba women cited female circumcision as one explanation for this difference. This suggests that geography rather than tribal affiliation was a determining factor in the spread and continuance of the practice. Archival evidence combined with oral interviews suggests that Bawku’s heterogeneous tribal make-up along with its positioning as a border town did influence the practicing of female circumcision. In this

388 Grischow, 83-84.

389 Group Interview, Binaba, West Kusasi, Upper-east region, Ghana. October 2010.

390 Ibid.
sense, the Bawkunaba’s inability to encourage the abandonment of female circumcision in Bawku was not only about being a colonial-appointed, Mamprusi chief but also about the borderlands being a space less comprehensible according to tribal taxonomy (as officials wished it so) than through complex social networks of cultural and economic interdependence. Moreover, as Patricia Carol Awiah has noted in her thesis on local responses to colonial rule in Kasena-Nankana area, religion and tensions between Christian sects played an important role in influencing the practice of female circumcision. From her work in the White Fathers archives, Awiah argues that Christians opposing the White Fathers and their converts got their daughters circumcised as an act of defiance against the teachings of the Catholic Church. 391

The element of ‘difference’ both within tribal categories in relation to others is important, as those practicing Kusasi become more identified with Busanga and Yanga ‘outsider’ groups than Kusasi as a distinct tribal category. This tells us much about how difference was constructed within indirect rule and how these constructions persist over time. In the colonial period, Busanga and Yanga peoples were constructed by colonial officials as ‘trouble-makers.’ They participated in a labour migration that was more local and in keeping their lands in French territory, they returned seasonally to farm and ensure against their confiscation by French authorities. With this pattern, marriage migration became an important factor, as households acted as “work sites both of domestic labour and direct production, forming, re- forming and dispersing in this region.”392 Yet, this

391 Patricia Carol Awiah, Colonial Rule and Local Responses in the Kasena-Nankana Area, 1905-1949, M Phil, University of Ghana, Legon, 2008.

constant movement involved complex negotiating of the borderland region, substantiating them as immigrants and not merely those ‘on the wrong side of the border’ at demarcation. Thus, when metropolitan questions resurfaced in 1949 regarding the government approved ‘milder’ practice of circumcision in Sudan, Gold Coast officials again used tribal taxonomy as a reference point. Officials claimed that female circumcision practices were now contained to only a few tribes who traditionally practiced (Nankanni, Sissalla, Lobi and Dagarti and Wala) and as far as the north-east was concerned, it was considered a foreign practice, performed by Moshis, Busangas and Yangas, “natives of the Haute Volta but who settle in considerable numbers in the Gold Coast.” These renewed debates about female circumcision in Sudan came about because metropolitan activists wanted to know about the progress made. But with this new inquiry came a focus on cartography and a map was drawn-up in 1949 which outlined the regions in West Africa where female circumcision was believed to still exist.

393 Chief Commissioner, Northern Territories to Acting Colonial Secretary of State, 16 March, 1949, Circumcision File, NAGT 8/2/34. Moreover, officials felt that those who did not practice it looked upon it poorly and that it was continued by the “older women who ridicule those younger than themselves on whom the operation has not been performed”. Officials felt that the propaganda efforts of the previous decade had had little effect. Since it was felt penal legislation would only work to drive the practice underground, the only solution left was increasing the education of girls. Of course, this was not put into place in any substantive way until after independence (Chapter 5 & 6) and even then, educated young women were vilified.

394 Rough Diagram Showing the Distribution of Female Circumcision, 1949, TNA U.K., FO 371/73668
The map seems to specify an area roughly the location of the Northern Territories which practiced infibulation. It was prepared by officials in Sudan and it included a legend in Arabic and English. It is possible the focus on West Africa is due to migration, but what is important here is that even in 1949 officials continued to understand female circumcision through an almost cartographic imagination of tribal autochthony.

4.6 Conclusion

Rattray had referred to two different ideas influencing policy in West Africa: that which favoured the Europeanization of Africans and privileged individual rights and that
which favoured the preservation of tradition and the rights of the tribe. In effect, these are
two views of development: one based on ‘community’ rights, and the other on the
individual. Rights of the ‘individual’ of course had been quickly taking shape in Asante
and the Colony. It was this very ‘detribalization’, commonly referred to as ‘Kumasi
sickness’ by northern officials, which was feared. With out-migration, age relations
shifted and the authority of elders was being superceded by that of young men and
particularly those returning from the southern mines and plantations with new wealth.
Moreover, bride-wealth agreements were changing and power struggles between chiefs
and amongst locals inhabiting the border were taking place. These tensions made it
extremely difficult for officials to work through the channels of native authority.

In their effort to reform indirect rule, administrators sought out Cameron’s vision
of indirect rule in Tanganyika for guidance. Cameron’s pamphlet provided general
instruction on how to deal with the issue of female circumcision, but it also provided
officials with a language with which to discuss women’s status. Shortly thereafter,
officials in northern Ghana advocated what they considered the mild form of female
circumcision. This was in reaction to what they perceived to be the more severe form
practiced in the north-east. The more severe form in the north-east was troubling for
officials because it was performed as a puberty rite. It could thus impede or complicate
biological reproduction. Official’s decision to preserve female circumcision in its
‘mildest’ form demonstrates an attempt for communion between community rites and
individual rights. This communion was important because the practices could be
continued and tradition could be preserved. A precedent for this was already set out in
the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. There, midwifery training programs taught indigenous
midwives how to perform a less severe form of circumcision which became known as ‘government circumcision.’ While no such program was implemented in Northern Ghana during the colonial period officials’ preference for the less severe form demonstrated an agreement concerning the importance of preserving the practices. Unlike in Sudan, where severity was defined through the extent of cutting, in Northern Ghana mild and severe seemed to be dictated by the age at which the procedure was performed. The reason for this was because the mild and severe were categorized in Northern Ghana by tribal lines – not severity – but what tribes practiced what form. Native administration structures dictated which tribe – and which form would be favoured. While in Sudan, officials attempted to distinguish severity as infibulation practiced by Muslim Sudanese, in Northern Ghana, it was its stateless, decentralized status that made tribe rather than religion the main category of analysis.

A main theme since Chapter One has been how initiation and female circumcision have fit within colonial policy in West Africa. Indirect rule dictated that the practices should be allowed to ‘die a natural death’. Paul Lovejoy has also used this phrase to describe the end of slavery in West African interior. For colonial officials, issues related to women were often intertwined with questions about slavery. Thus, it is no surprise that debates concerning female circumcision are reminiscent of those concerning the end of slavery and the gradualism of emancipation. As Anne Phillips reminds, gradualism in West Africa was a product of instabilities in colonial power and fears about provoking unrest that might destabilize colonial rule. This is why questions pertaining to slavery were so tricky; the question of slavery was what facilitated European incursion into the interior and abolishing the practice justified formal colonial rule. Once formal rule was
established, a gradualist policy toward emancipation was put in place and by 1920s the notion of ‘community’ founded through tribe and tradition guided development along native lines. As Michael Cowen and Robert W. Shenton reminds us, this was a fundamental principle of development as the idea was to allow the state to construct the positive, community based alternative to the disorder brought about by an immanent process of capitalism. In taking the approach of social education and propaganda through native administrative structures officials sought to create community that would defend against the dissolution of tribal structure.

The next chapter will discuss colonial debates concerning the prevalence of female pawning along Ghana’s north-eastern borderlands in the 1930s. As the depression hit the West African interior in the 1930s, pawning became more prevalent. The chapter will focus on a court case concerning the pawning of three young girls from French territory, across the border to Bawku, and onward to the cocoa plantations of the south. Through the testimonies of these three young girls and others, I will discuss how female circumcision was not the only practice officials wished would simply ‘die-out’ without legislation. This was difficult because, although different from slavery, pawning was still considered a form of dependence. The question of whether the three girls were pawned or enslaved had more to do with a colonial policy of gradualism than did the girls’ own testimonies; pawning was considered another undesirable practice that could not be controlled by colonial governance and simply had to be managed.
Chapter 5

‘Slavery in a European Sense Does Not Exist in the Gold Coast’:

Pawning as Undesirable in late-colonial Bawku, 1941-1948

There is probably no condition in life more hateful to man than slavery – even in this country where the domestic slave is not necessarily a drudge and has many privileges which some free people in other countries might envy. It is quite possible that primitive communities like those in the Northern Territories might be disturbed by an investigation regarding the extent to which slavery still forms a part of the local domestic arrangement or political economy. It may break up compounds or weaken the authority of the local Chiefs and it seems doubtful whether any real benefit will be gained by anyone.

- J.C de Graft Johnson, Asst. Secretary for Native Affairs, “Memo on the Vestiges of Slavery in the Gold Coast,” 1927

In August of 1941, three girls characterized as ‘Busanga’ ages eleven, fourteen and ten appeared before the British colonial administrator in the northeastern border town of Bawku, Northern Territories. The three girls were providing testimony as to their status as slaves or ‘pawns’. Their testimonies intended to establish whether they were indeed victims of a persistent trade in northerners to the Gold Coast colony. From the transcript of the hearing we learn that around the year 1930 the girls Atawa, Abnofo, and Kibadu had been taken from their homes in French territory (present day Burkina Faso) and brought to Bawku in British territory. Allegedly, the French Chief of Zatugu had ‘sold’

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395 J.C. de Graft Johnson, Asst. Secretary for Native Affairs, Accra, 18 October, 1927, “Memo on the Vestiges of Slavery in the Gold Coast”, Domestic Slavery, NAGT 8/2/204

396 Kwaku Anin vs. C.O.P., Slave Dealing 1937-48, NAGT 8/2/205
the girls to an Ashanti man, a trader named Kwaku Anin, who had subsequently taken them to work on a farm in Ankasi, near Kumasi where they lived and worked for ten years. Upon their return to the north-east in 1941, Luwanda, the widowed mother of one of the girls heard news in the market that her daughter might have been one of the three girls brought by the Asante man. By this time, Anin and the three girls were already in the custody of the police, who had begun their investigation into the matter. As always in matters of slave dealing, establishing what goods or cash exchanged hands was imperative. In this case, it was demonstrated that Anin had clearly paid for the Busanga girls, but in his defense, Anin claimed that the Chief had given the girls to him as wives, and the money exchanged was partial bride-wealth. To strengthen his defense, Anin further explained that the transaction was in cash rather than livestock because, being an Asante man, he did not possess cows and was not aware of Busanga customs. Determined to redeem her daughter Atawa through the courts, the widow Luwanda maintained that regardless of whatever transaction occurred between the Chief and Anin, her daughter was wrongfully taken from her by force and by the Chief’s men. In an appeal that seemed to strike a chord with the British Magistrate, Luwanda blamed the forceful taking and sale of her daughter on the French system of direct rule. In particular, she cited her inability as a sickly widow to pay l’impôt, the direct tax compulsory in French West Africa:

I am a house wife of Zatugu of French territory. I do not know the accused, I know the last witness who is my daughter. A long time ago, when my leg was sick; the chief called my daughter because I could not pay my l’impôt: I

was unable to go because my leg was sick. My husband was dead; he died when I was pregnant with my daughter Atawa. A month later I went to the chief when my leg was better to ask him where my daughter was. The chief gave no reply. The girl was then about four years old. The chief’s wife Kari told me that my daughter had been sold to one Ashanti man. I only went back to my house crying: it was not usual for a woman with no husband though quite usual for women with husbands. They could never tell me what they did with my daughter. Thirty days ago I heard in Zatugu market, someone told me that a certain Ashanti man had arrived in Bawku with three girls, perhaps one of them was my own daughter. I then went straight to Bawku; there at the Police Station I saw my daughter; I had first asked the Busanganaba. I recognized her because of the marks on her face and on her stomach when I put when she was a baby. I called her Atawa; she had no other name.³⁹⁸

At the conclusion of the trial, Kwaku Anin was found guilty of slave dealing by Asst. D.C. and Magistrate C.C.R. Amory. Despite testimonies that supported the charge the three girls were in fact outright ‘sold,’ the Magistrate hesitated to declare them full slaves – “for the accepted meaning of slave with all the harshness and cruelty it implies could not be applied to the treatment of these girls.”³⁹⁹ Instead, the Magistrate believed Anin regarded the girls as a long term investment, with the notion to “dispose of them as surety for a ‘never-to-be-repaid-loan’ to someone in Ashanti for some substantial sum.”⁴⁰⁰ His judgment, along with the contents of the transcript, suggest a transaction akin to pawning, a form of bondage where an individual is transferred from one kinship group to another

³⁹⁸ Kwaku Anin vs. C.O.P., Slave Dealing 1937-48, NAGT 8/2/205. Note the term ‘Busanganaba’ refers to the Busanga Chief Representative in Bawku whereas the Chief of Zatugu resides in Zatugu in French Territory.


⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.
as security for a loan. It was a practice prevalent in the Voltaic region of depression-era West Africa, and along the north-eastern borderlands of the Gold Coast, in particular.

The cross-border sale of the three Busanga girls in this case highlights what colonial administrators had noted to be an increase in people categorized as Busanga crossing over into Bawku in the 1930s. Since the early 1920s, this movement was largely attributed to the incorporation of Togoland mandate into British jurisdiction. However, as we have seen in Chapter Four, colonial administrators in the north-east sometimes referred to Busangas as ‘foreigners’, implicating them in the spread of undesirable customs such as female circumcision into British Territory. That the three Busanga girls in this case seem to be held in some form of bondage raises important questions regarding ethnicity, slavery and pawning in the British Gold Coast. Similarly, how migration and household economy were negotiated by both colonial administrators and Africans along this north-eastern border is also a major issue. Most importantly, the Kwaku Anin case invites us to make connections between borderland groups, ‘foreigner’ rhetoric, and 1940s colonial development initiatives centered upon ‘community’ – a category of inclusion and exclusion – in Northern Territories of the Gold Coast.

The 1941 court file entitled *Kwaku Anin vs. C.O.P* is an astonishingly rich piece of colonial litigation. Here, we are not only given a relatively rare glimpse into the late-colonial court system as it functioned along the far-flung borderlands of the north-east, but we are also given the translated testimonies of the pawned Busanga girls. While

401 Klein and Roberts, “The Resurgence of Pawning in French West Africa During the Depression of the 1930s,” 411.

402 The testimonies of the three girls become especially important when considering both the paltry source material on pawning in colonial West Africa and the extent to which existing sources rely on chiefs.
their ability to truly ‘speak’ through this male, colonial court framework is debatable, their testimony nevertheless offers us a crucial opportunity to explore their perspectives about this ten-year period over which they were ‘taken’ and subsequently redeemed. As Marcia Wright notes of working with African women’s slave narratives, “Undiluted personal narratives have a power of their own, not to be usurped by analysis. Yet in the interpretation of such texts, history claims a place beyond mere elucidation.” I have structured this chapter in such a way that we may move between text and context and history as a larger synthesis and provided texts at length and in original form so as to preserve the personal narrative from the unavoidable manipulation of historians’ entextualization and re-contextualization. The fact the testimonies here point to a trade in Busanga females makes our present case appear terribly unique, particularly when set within our larger discussion of late-colonial development in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast.

Beyond the testimonies of young girls, this case warrants attention because in it we hear individuals whose testimonies speak to important themes unfolding at this time throughout 1940s British colonial Africa. With the defendant Kwaku Anin we learn the ways of an Asante kola trader working the long-travelled north-south trade routes

and senior elders. Gareth Austin has argued that this likely helped to obscure the importance of pawns in both economy and society. Gareth Austin, “Human Pawning in Asante, 1820-1950: Markets and Coercion, Gender and Cocoa,” in Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa eds., Paul Lovejoy and Toyin Falola (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 188.

403 Wright, 123.

extending from the interior down through to the coast. In the widow Luwanda’s testimony, we hear a woman manipulating the British colonial courts to her advantage and in so doing, offering a clear and purposeful lamentation of French administration. With the conviction of Anin and the return of the girls to French Territory, we see the precedence given to lineage structure as well as resistance to this paternalism as displayed in the testimony of one of the girls, Kibadu. And finally, in the British Assistant D.C. we see a Magistrate who struggles to reconcile the colonial government’s policy of gradualism toward the eradication of domestic slavery with the varying and often conflicting testimonies put before him. As we read against the grain and in between the lines, we find voices that place the border at the center of lives and livelihoods in 1940s north-east. The centrality of the border, and indeed the movement of peoples categorized as ‘Busanga’ in the Anin case offers us greater understanding of how Africans of greater or lesser economic abilities navigated, negotiated and circumvented Anglo-French borderlands in West Africa. Moreover, it also offers us a critical opportunity to chart the social, political, and economic condition of Bawku during the depression (when the girls were initially ‘taken’) into the beginnings of the late-colonial period. As the chapter moves further into the 1940s, the border becomes even more important to our narrative of ‘undesirable customs’, whether they be female circumcision, slave-dealing, or the movement of ‘foreign’ peoples perceived to be vectors of such customs. Taken together, the stories discussed in this chapter point to an increasingly bureaucratized West African hinterland. And while this ‘rigidification’ of the northern borderlands may be seen as a by-product of late-colonial development in the region, it is questionable just how ‘real’ the borderlands remained for north-easterners on either side.
of the Anglo-French partition.\footnote{Here, I have adopted the term ‘rigidification’ from Dereje Feyissa’s chapter “More State than the State? The Anywaa’s Call for the Rigidification of the Ethio-Sudanese Border” in \textit{Borders and Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa} eds., Dereje Feyissa and Markus Virgil Hoehne (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey Press, 2010), 27-44.} There is perhaps no better starting point for such a discussion than debt-bondage and the process of pawning itself, which was considered by 1940s metropolitan opinion to be a most undesirable practice in British colonial Africa.

5.1 “Slavery in a European sense does not exist in the Gold Coast”: gradualist consensus in 1940s Northern Ghana

Concern over the persistence of pawning in 1940s British West Africa reflected an almost insatiable interest by some in the metropole to investigate and extinguish vestiges of slavery in colonial Africa. While this interest had remained buoyed over time by groups such as the Anti-Slavery Society, Suzanne Miers has noted that investigations increased in the late inter-war period.\footnote{Suzanne Miers, “Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues 1890-1939.” In \textit{Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa} eds., Suzanne Miers and Martin Klein (London: Frank Cass 1999).} Until the transfer of British representation on the League of Nations Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery (ACE) from Lord Lugard to the assiduous George Maxwell, many of these efforts were ‘paper tigers.’\footnote{Ibid.} However, Maxwell’s tenure – coinciding as it did with the adjudication of the Kwaku Anin case – foreshadowed a post World War II mindset from which sprang intensified interest in African women and children as dependents. With the coming of the ‘second colonial occupation’ these so-called ‘paper tigers’ grew teeth, putting colonial administrators in the uncomfortable position of negotiating how and to what extent slave dealing cases would be litigated, and deciding what language should be used to frame the adjudication.
of matters intimately tied to political-economy. Exemplifying this rejuvenated interest, Lord Hailey stated in 1942 that he was concerned there were “in the Colonial Empire a considerable number of people who are condemned to live in what has generally been described as a state of serfdom,” citing pawnng in West Africa particular. The specific reference to pawnng in this speech reflected popular beliefs in Britain that pawnng was connected to domestic slavery, even that the two were one and the same. Bending to pressure from the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society in 1948, the Secretary of State for the Colonies enquired for further information from British West African colonies. In a response that reflected apathy as much as irritation, the Gold Coast government stated that there was not much point in asking for information from the District Commissioners as pawnng still existed as well as “a trade in children from the Northern Territories” particularly. In the Gold Coast government’s response we see how the very persistence of the trade in Northern children ensured that further inquiries would not be made.

This irritated response from the Gold Coast government to the Colonial Office in 1948 is unsurprising. As we have seen in earlier chapters, colonial administrators in West Africa often approached metropolitan inquiries into customs tied to marriage, household

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409 Martin Klein and Richard Roberts have noted that this belief was also pervasive among colonial administrators in French West Africa as well.

economy, and family structure quite gingerly. Following uproar over clitoridectomy in the late 1920s and early 1930s, female circumcision came to be one of several customs thought to compromise the status of women and children in British colonial Africa. In an effort to insulate themselves against a battery of metropolitan inquiry, governors in West Africa came to a consensus on the matter and in Chapter One we saw how strategies of denial and understatement worked to moderate opinion relative to existing colonial knowledge produced in Sudan and Kenya. It was not women’s oppression that was feared, argued Governors in British West Africa, but that African women had too much power, and were in need of greater control. Of course, these colonial desires to control women persisted throughout the colonial period, spilling over into the post-colonial era as we shall see in coming chapters. However, despite concerted effort in the early colonial period to prevent further inquiry into undesirable customs, there were some who sought to make the new findings of colonial anthropologists known throughout Empire. Governor Slater of the Gold Coast was one such individual. His commitment to carry forth the concerns of Captain Rattray, ran counter to the wishes of the Colonial Office and his colleagues in West Africa. Despite a revealing report issued by the Gold Coast followed by Rattray’s publication of his findings in *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland* legislating against female circumcision in British West Africa did not happen. As with other practices tied to marriage, household economy, and African ‘tradition,’ female circumcision was left to ‘die a natural death.’ It was precisely this gradualist perspective, embedded as it was in the evolutionism of scientific racism and trusteeship, that explains how pawning was treated by Northern administrators throughout the 1940s.
In *Kwaku Anin vs C.O.P* slave dealing and pawnship seemed to merge in the Magistrate’s struggle to decipher court testimonies. While in practice the lines between the two were blurry – “pawns could end up as slaves and slaves were sometimes pawned” - pawnship is best defined as an interconnected yet distinct system of slavery, in which people are held in debt-bondage as collateral for loans. For some time, the sheer volume of scholarship on the Atlantic slave trade and domestic slavery worked to overshadow pawnning’s prevalence in West African history. Prior to 2003, scholars of African history and African slave systems had given little attention to pawnning. As a result, while historical scholarship on the topic remains thin and does not allow for generalization we are able to discern a fair amount from those historians who have traditionally focused on slavery. In West Africa much of this information has come from scholars working on slavery in French colonial Africa (Martin Klein and Richard Roberts) and slavery and diaspora (Paul Lovejoy and Toyin Falola) in conjunction with those concerned with political-economy (Gareth Austin) who have worked to explain the relationship between debt-bondage and commodity markets. From this scholarship it is clear that pawnning was quite pervasive in pre-colonial West Africa. Lovejoy and Falola have explained its development as resulting from three, interdependent factors: the trans-


413 I have chosen not to engage with the scholarship of anthropologists on pawnning. While the work of Rattray and Mary Douglas has proved useful for the scholars whom I cite here, I believe a sustained discussion of anthropological perspectives would unnecessarily detract from the main objectives set out in this chapter. For a critical discussion of Mary Douglas’ work, see: Richard Fardon, *Mary Douglas: an intellectual biography* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
Atlantic slave trade; the spread of slavery within the continent; and, the commercialization of indigenous economies.\textsuperscript{414} This meant that while pawning grew alongside slavery, it nevertheless remained a form of dependency distinct from slavery and bound by kin relations. More specifically, however, Robert Shenton has pointed to land as the primary contributing factor to the persistence of pawning. The prevention or rolling back of private property in land was a central tenet of the West Africa Policy; the focus on communal, peasant agriculture outlined by both Phillips and Shenton precluded Africans’ use of private property in land as security for loans.\textsuperscript{415} Thus, security for loans was only found in crops or people. The use of people, rather than private property in land, as security for loans helps to explain how pawning was bound by kin relations. Since the debt-bondage of an individual functioned as security against a loan, the debtor would pawn his relatives to a creditor with the eventual desire to redeem the pawn. The drive to redeem (and thus for the creditor to get repaid) was predicated upon bonds of kinship. Indeed, affection or social pressures felt between debtor and pawn often served as tools encouraging redemption.\textsuperscript{416} Thus, one important difference between pawning and slavery in pre-colonial Asante was that whereas the creditor most often came from the same society as the debtor, in slavery the new slave normally was considered an outsider from another society – a ‘foreigner.’\textsuperscript{417}

\textsuperscript{414} Loveoy and Falola, Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa, 1-26.

\textsuperscript{415} For a discussion on prevention of private property in land in Northern Nigeria see Shenton, Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria, 41-47. Here, Shenton points out how decisions about land tenure in Nigeria filtered through the West African Land Committee to eventually impact the formation of land law in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast.

\textsuperscript{416} Ibid., 5

\textsuperscript{417} Ibid.
Late-colonial files entitled ‘domestic slavery’ and ‘slave dealing’ demonstrate how officials struggled to differentiate various forms of dependency. It seems that in pre-colonial times, pawning served important functions for both creditor and debtor. One perspective put forth is that pawning acted as a sort of safety net in Asante society.\footnote{418} When someone was going through a period of hardship they would ask a kin member to take him or his children into debt-bondage for a period of time (indeed, people often did pawn themselves). So embedded was this safety net in Asante society that to refuse to take a kin member on as a pawn was to compromise one’s honour and status in society; those with the means were obligated to take care of their own who were less fortunate.\footnote{419} This explanation of pawning reveals the extent to which some scholars have viewed it as a form of mutual aid. However, it also explains the efforts of others such as Gareth Austin, in exposing pawning as “one-sided enrichment.”\footnote{420} Austin’s wealth-seeking perspective is crucial, as it allows us to critically discuss colonial administrators’ praise of functionalist aspects of pawning.

The importance of traditional pawning in pre-colonial Asante explains the extent to which colonial administrators sought to distance it from “European slavery” in the metropolitan mind. In response to inquiries regarding the persistence of slavery in 1927, Secretary for Native Affairs J.C. de Graft Johnson not only stated that “Slavery in the European sense does not exist in the Gold Coast,” but also that domestic slavery exists


\footnote{419} Ibid.

\footnote{420} Ibid.
“only in name and will die out with a generation or so.” However, a differentiated approach to the Northern Territories seemed to have been in place, an approach that de Graft Johnson intended to be reconciled with the extension of the laws of the Colony to that of Ashanti and the Northern Territories:

In certain parts of Ashanti and in district near the Western and Eastern Frontiers of the Colony domestic conditions in this respect are no better than in the Northern Territories, but in the Colony it may be assumed that there locally at least a person who is being held as a slave can easily regain his freedom for the asking […] for these reasons no special legislation appears necessary, but chapter 6 of the laws of the Colony, with the necessary modifications, may with advantage be applied to Ashanti and the Northern Territories, so as to make the law regarding the liberty of the subject uniform through the whole country.  

However, despite intentions to ensure uniformity of rights throughout the jurisdictions, administrators continued to treat cases of domestic slavery originating in the North with leniency. Indeed, we need only remember the numerous informal diary references to ‘logging’ and shackling of women discussed in Chapter Three to substantiate this point. Pawning, on the other hand, represented an even more ambiguous middle ground between ‘free labour’ and slavery.  

As such, de Graft Johnson stressed its further distinction between ‘European’ slavery and domestic slavery, acknowledging that while pawning was “still practiced to some extent…there is no criminal intention behind it and

\[421\] J.C. de Graft Johnson, Asst. Secretary for Native Affairs, Accra, 18 October, 1927, “Memo on the Vestiges of Slavery in the Gold Coast”, Domestic Slavery, in NAGT 8/2/204

\[422\] Klein and Roberts. “The Resurgence of Pawning in French West Africa During the Depression of the 1930s”
[it] will diminish in time.” As we shall see later, this focus on criminal intent as well as ‘treatment’ of pawns became a focal point in litigating incidences of slave dealing in the region.

Noting in 1941 that the sale of children for money in French territory was apparently “not at all uncommon,” Magistrate C.C.R. Amory explained that the close proximity of French Busanga to British Bawku made cross-border pawning particularly attractive since parents could ensure the girls were “well looked after.” Moreover, Amory reflected, the pawned girls could return easily to attend family funerals and if they were unhappy, they could run away back to their parents’ homes. The result, reported the British D.C. was that there were “many such girls now living in Bawku.”

Amory’s ‘matter-of-fact’, functionalist approach to the prevalence of pawning in Bawku and along the north-eastern borderland fits the gradualist narrative set out in previous chapters. Yet, this straightforward observation is not only attributable to some abstract colonial commitment to gradualism. Rather, it is more likely that this increase in pawning and trade in Northern children was more a social reality – a product of social and economic hardships experienced during the Depression and in its aftermath. As Martin Klein and Richard Roberts have shown, pawning underwent a marked resurgence in 1930s West Africa. This resurgence was especially noted in the interior regions of West Africa such as the Voltaic region and in Mande areas. Of course, pawning has always served as an unequal, yet important mechanism for survival during times of

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423 J. C. de Graft Johnson, Asst. Secretary for Native Affairs, Accra 18 October 1927, Domestic Slavery, NAGT 8/2/204

424 C. C. R. Amory Asst. District Commissioner, Bawku to Chief Commissioner, Northern Territories, Tamale, Slave Dealing 1937-48, NAGT 8/2/205
famine and poor harvest. However, as the Depression set in, capitalist influences intensified these traditional reasons for pawning and in Klein’s and Roberts words, “people became the only possible form of security.”\textsuperscript{425} It seems the Kwaku Anin case found its way into the colonial courts not as a result of de Graft Johnson’s promise in 1927 to extend ‘the law regarding the liberty of the subject’ to the North, but rather, as a result of local disputes in which African actors went to colonial courts for their own ends. Nowhere was this more striking than in the testimony of the widow, Luwanda.

5.2 “How can I get money to pay l’impot?” the Widow, Luwanda Busanga

The year in which the three girls were sold (1931) was a particularly difficult year for those residing across the border from Bawku in French Territory. The sharp drop in commodity prices in 1931 and 1932 left many households struggling to pay taxes and feed children. In regions of French West Africa such as Upper Volta where revenue from taxes relied heavily upon migrant labour, many were forced to pawn children.\textsuperscript{426} Unlike areas along the coast, where pawning had once been extensive, in the interior alternative options for credit remained few and drought worked to exacerbate these conditions.\textsuperscript{427} Moreover, French administrators were reported to be especially ruthless in tax collection during this time, sometimes imposing beatings and taking hostages.\textsuperscript{428} As we saw from Luwanda’s testimony in the introduction, the pressure to pay French taxes – l’impot – was especially pressing for those with little means. As a widow, Luwanda would have

\textsuperscript{425} Klein and Roberts, 411- 412.

\textsuperscript{426} Ibid., 409-426.

\textsuperscript{427} Ibid., 422.

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 417.
especially felt this pressure. As with Kenda Mutongi’s work on widowhood in 1940s western Kenya, a widow lost much of her social and economic status upon her husband’s death. Their positioning as a widow in a patrilineal society mean that control over their children diminished and their place in the community became ambiguous. Luwanda’s hardships as a widow in depression-era Upper Volta were further compounded by her sickness, which would have limited her mobility. While many in the region used the borderlands to their advantage, moving across the partition to evade taxes, Luwanda would not have enjoyed such mobility. Furthermore, while many parents chose to pawn their children during this time, it was highly unorthodox for women to exert this authority. Certainly, political circumstances worked to shape the institution of pawning over time but in a traditional sense it was often the father, uncle, or lineage head that held the authority to make these decisions. Luwanda’s own testimony that “it was not usual for a woman with no husband [to pawn her children] though quite usual for women with husbands” supports this claim. Indeed, Luwanda’s testimony appears purposefully clever when considered within the context of Mutongi’s work. It seems that in Maragoli, Kenya, widows used the public space of the courts to appeal to men in the community for help, and did so in a way that exploited benevolent aspects of ‘ideal’ masculinity in the region. Likewise, while in 1931 Luwanda found herself at the mercy of l’impot, French officials, and the Chief of Zatugu, by 1941 she had realized British courts to be an effective tool. Indeed, her lament over the French administration evoked the sympathy of the Magistrate

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430 Klein and Roberts, 409-426.
C.C.R. Amory, who, in his closing remarks left no question of her innocence regarding the pawning of her daughter, Atawa, reporting that in this case parents were not in fact pawning their children, and “certainly not the mother whose daughter was taken away forcibly from her.”

5.3 Chiefs Know Their Boundaries (?): Male Networks and the Feminization of Pawning

By the Depression in the 1930s, capitalist influences and a burgeoning cash economy worked to transform the institution of pawning in important ways. As Klein and Roberts have shown, this intense period of social and economic hardship compounded with drought and famine in the interior led to a resurgence of pawning in French West Africa. This resurgence is notable not only because of the thin amount of existing scholarship on pawning, but rather because others have argued that pawning had begun to decline in the Gold Coast during the colonial period. While pawning may have initially increased in response to the abolition of slavery it seems it began to decrease with the introduction of wage-labour in the early colonial period. What is crucial to note (and what has perhaps been ignored in analyses forgetting gender) is that this reduction in pawning was almost entirely male-oriented. The transition from slave labour to wage labour was indeed slow but it nevertheless led to an alienation of male, wage labour specifically. Thus this apparent decrease was gendered, and limited to males. The intensification of wage-labour was also tied to land and colonial policy dictated that land remain ‘public’ rather than be privatized. Without access to private property in land,

431 Kwaku Anin vs. C.O.P., Slave Dealing 1937-48, NAGT 8/2/205
people had little way to pay debts or taxes in times of hardship.\textsuperscript{432} These factors led to what Gareth Austin has referred to in his work on pawning and cocoa markets as the “feminization of pawning.”\textsuperscript{433}

Increasing pressure for revenue in the form of taxes seems to have led to increased pawning and even sale of young girls to raise money. While more research needs to be done on the topic, Martin Klein and Richard Roberts have uncovered evidence from the Catholic White Fathers archives that suggests French administrators encouraged village chiefs to ‘sell’ children, particularly girls, to fulfil tax obligations.\textsuperscript{434}

In one report from Diallonké in western Soudan, people who were unable to pay taxes were ordered to deliver a certain number of girls to the market, where it seems a makeshift auction of sorts was conducted. However, as Luwanda stated, it was male heads of household who held the authority to pawn; in this sense, it was not so much that pawning was a transgression, but rather that it was done through force by the Chief and without the widow’s knowledge. The extent to which political, economic, and social circumstances shaped ‘who’ had the authority to pawn ‘whom’ is still a topic of further research since “pawnship was tied to kinship, but pawns were not always kin.”\textsuperscript{435} Yet, whether the Chief of Zatugu sold, or pawned the girls under similar circumstances as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{432} Shenton, \textit{The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria}, 22-49.
  \item \textsuperscript{433} Austin, “Human Pawning in Asante, 1820-1950”, 187-213.
  \item \textsuperscript{434} Klein and Roberts, 413-414. They have noted that these ‘sales’ continued even though the White Fathers had offered to pay the tax for some families if the families promised not to sell their daughters. It should be noted that while the White Fathers enjoyed a certain measure of success in their north-western missions such as Jirapa, they were never allowed to expand further eastward than Navrongo. The extent to which White Father influence in Navrongo emanated through to Bawku is indiscernible, but archives suggest Catholic influence in the far-north east was extremely marginal at this time.
  \item \textsuperscript{435} Lovejoy and Falola, 11
\end{itemize}
those outlined by Klein and Roberts is at the moment unknown. What we do know from the Bawku administrator’s report is that into the 1940s many Busanga families were pawning their daughters across the border, leading to what Amory called “many such girls now living in Bawku.” This evidence is small, however, and suffice it to say that further attention to the missionary archives of the White Fathers in Navrongo by scholars in the future may hold a key to understanding transformations of pawning in the 1930s.

That the resurgence of pawning in 1930s French West Africa occurred due to capitalist forces which in turn led to an increase in female pawns did not mean that women and young girls were not always considered valuable. While men were productive as labourers, women often shouldered both the productive burdens of labour (often more extensive and differentiated than men) as well as social and physical reproduction; not only did they labour on farms, but also labored in domestic duties integral to social reproduction (such as preparing food) as well as reproduction. Among the matrilineal Asante, the reproductive capacity of female pawns was of particular importance, as a man could not exert control over his children as this was the purview of the maternal uncle. The production of children from a female pawn (either as a concubine or as a wife) provided Asante males with labour over which only they and not their matrilineages could exert control. This significantly added to a man’s wealth and prestige, as slaves along with gold and other adornments continued to serve as outward displays of status despite British sumptuary laws. Moreover, according to Lovejoy and Falola, gender mattered “because the creditor was concerned with the recovery of the loan, and marriage, either to the creditor himself or a relative, was a means of capitalizing
on an investment.”\footnote{Ibid.} While not ideal, marriages between creditors and pawns were common and served an important function, particularly for upwardly mobile men of matrilineal societies.

The tendency for upwardly mobile men to acquire and sometimes marry their female pawns further confused colonial administrators who already had a difficult time trying to distinguish between pawning, outright sales, and marriage not to mention sorting bride-wealth payments from loans and commodity transactions.\footnote{Martin and Klein, 419.} In taking on the especially tricky task of judging whether the accused - an Asante kola trader - was guilty of slave dealing, Asst. D.C. Amory was faced with such a challenge. We already know from the testimony above that Luwanda focused her blame on the Chief, whom she believed wrongfully took Atawa from her in lieu of \textit{l’impot}. We also know that the Magistrate seemed to believe Luwanda, and did not think her or the other guardians to be involved in the ‘sale’ of the girls. Moreover, Luwanda had testified to the fact that she did not know the accused when asked by him directly:

\begin{quote}
x
xx by the accused Do you know me?

A. No.
xx [do you know any of the other?] girls?

A. I only know about my own daughter.
\end{quote}

In clearly establishing for the court that they did not know one another, Anin was given a crucial opportunity to distance himself from the actual ‘taking’ of Atawa, effectively shifting the burden of culpability onto the Chief. However, the Magistrate’s judgment of
the culpability of Kwaku Anin was a bit more complex. This complexity resulted from a combination of Amory’s inability to discern the ‘true’ nature of the transactions and Anin’s careful testimony which sought to capitalize on this confusion.

5.4 Pawning, Marriage, and Manipulation: the defendant, Kwaku Anin

As a kola trader, Kwaku Anin made important commercial connections with chiefs and ‘big men’ in Bawku and the interior and it was through these connections he sought to diffuse blame. Like the institution of pawning, the kola trade in West Africa was tied to the commercial circuits of the trans-Saharan and Atlantic slave trades. As we saw in Chapter One, nineteenth century jihads swept the region, leading to a significant expansion of Islam and the kola trade. The Sokoto Caliphate in particular fostered demand for this stimulant, which served as an important alternative to those stimulants prohibited in Islam, such as alcohol. As Paul Lovejoy has shown for this period, some entrepreneurial traders took advantage of this expansion by ‘adopting’ a Hausa ethnicity in an effort to smooth commercial transactions and integrate into trading associations. The idea underpinning this was that it was kola, rather than one’s specific birthplace, which bound regional commercial networks. While the kola trade had slowed significantly by the twentieth century, these commercial networks were not completely erased and demand for kola, albeit on a smaller scale, continued particularly in the interior. Although a small-scale trader, Anin had found a market in Bawku and it was through the commercial connections he fostered there that he told his story of how he acquired the first girl, Kibadu.

I am a kola trader. I came to Bawku with kola. If someone come to me I used to treat him well, so as to encourage him to buy my kola. I knew a Busanga who used to call me
Zatto: he brought me many customers. The Busangaman used to stay with me in Bawku. I frequently used to give him the damaged kolanuts as a present; I also used to keep their kola loads. The Busanga man and I were very close friends. He asked me “Aare [sic] you one of the chief’s sons?” I replied by asking him if he were a chief’s son. He said “yes, I am a chief’s son, many follow me into British territory: give me some kola to give to my father.” So I gave him 6 nuts: he returned to French territory; I got to know many people through him. I became his agent in Bawku. I asked my friend will you give me a wife to marry. My friend returned to French territory, and then returned to Bawku: he said the chief had agreed to give me a wife to marry; he came back with a girl; one of the three girls in this case. He took the girl to Busanaba. The girl was Kibadu (Ama Yeboah). My friend said he would take three cattle for her; my friend’s name was Sakara I asked “my friend is this your custom”; he agreed. I said where can I get cattle to give you? He said “if you have no cattle you can give me money instead”. I sold my kola and got a lot of French five franc notes. I gave him 90 (ninety). I said “take them home and I myself will follow you”. I asked Sakara “where is my friend”, Sakara said I have told my landlord. I returned and then went to Sakara’s landlord [sic] who said “Sakara has told me he has got the dollars” I again asked the landlord, the Busanaba, “is that so, that when you have no cattle you give money instead”. He said “yes”. My friend then gave me the girl. I returned to Ashanti with the girl.

There are two points in this portion of Anin’s statement that beg clarification. First, since Anin had worked the trade routes stretching from ‘Kumase’ through ‘French Soudan’ he would have certainly acquired some knowledge of Busanga or Mossi customs. This is particularly true if he had as he said fostered important contacts in Bawku, since by 1931 there were a certain number of Busanga living in town under the tutelage of the Busanganaba. Simply put, his ignorance seems feigned and unconvincing given his trade. Second, if Anin was indeed seeking a wife – and a Busanga wife at that – he would have certainly been aware in advance of the increasing liquidity of marriage transactions.
particular, he would have known the increasing inflation of bride-wealth and how this inflation was slowly giving rise to shifts in the Northern Territories from livestock (which was becoming increasingly scarce) to cash (which was in increasing demand) as an acceptable mode of payment.438 This shift in bride-wealth payments from livestock to cash was notable, not least because in the past, livestock was considered male property and received by the family’s males. However, with cash, bride-wealth became as Kendra Mutongi notes, a “less gendered and more democratic asset” and widows could keep and hide it from male relatives. By the 1950s, these changes in marriage transactions had become so inconspicuous in the Northern Territories that British administrators in Zuarungu sought to harness the dowry system for their own ends by modifying it in order to encourage the development of mixed farming.439 In setting out, they were loath to find out that women were actively using the Courts to claim dowries for their daughters.440 As Dobbs reports with disdain in 1950:

Recently cases have occurred in which women have appeared in Court claiming dowries for their daughters. I have not been able to investigate any of these cases but I

438 The region is also known for exchange marriage, and marriage with bridewealth was, for some groups, a colonial invention.

439 Assistant D.C. N.O. Dobbs, November 11, 1950, Fra Fra Cattle (Dowry System), in NAGT 8/2/209. The colonial logic of the Assistant DC of Zuarungu went something like this: in this district adjacent to Kusasi – ‘Fra Fra’ that is, the pejorative district of Kansena-Navrongo - dowry had increased. Until 1947, dowry was usually paid in cattle. Now, cattle had increased in importance. In Frafra areas, there existed 25,000 cattle and 30,000 sheep or goats while there were about 35,000 marriages in force at any one time. Given the rate of marriages (3 on average for a FraFra girl) the cattle circulate fast and dowry liabilities become complicated, setting off “chain cases” in the courts. Efforts to limit dowry were put in place in 1946 when it was decided that dowry should be limited to two cows. Again, we see administrators looking to use the custom to their economic advantage.

440 Dowry is a misnomer here as it typically refers to the couple or the groom’s family, not to the family of the bride, but administrators used the term as synonymous with bridewealth.
suspect that these women are brothel-keepers whose young ladies have escaped. Any dowry cases in which women appear should be viewed with greatest suspicion, as the right to claim dowry rests with a girl’s father or if he is dead with his next-of-kin who is always a male. Women have no standing in dowry cases at all.\footnote{Assistant D.C. N.O. Dobbs, November 11, 1950, \textit{Fra Fra Cattle (Dowry System)}, in NAGT 8/2/209.}

Although the sale of the girls occurred in 1931, it seems that Anin was feigning ignorance of these transformations that were already underway. His repeated references to his ignorance on this matter and of Busanga customs generally seeks to diminish his culpability as does his desire for his assurance that cash was indeed acceptable. In this portion of the testimony concerning Kibadu, Anin is clearly trying to depict himself as an uninformed Asante trader, innocent of criminal intention.

The remainder of Anin’s testimony builds upon this defense. However, he is careful to include important details that would substantiate his story that he had acquired the girls through the cash payment of bride-wealth. In particular, he makes note of the gifts he brings with him on his return visit to Bawku/Zatugu and the requirements the Chief of Zatugu places upon him before the village spectacle in which he announces, “I am going to give Atawa to Kwaku.”

Then I came to Bawku. Sakara again brought many customers to buy my kola. Sakara then said that the chief of his village asked me to come and visit him. I said I was afraid: I went back to Kumasi, I came back again with an umbrella and kola, and a cap, and I told Busanaba that the chief of Zatugu wanted me to visit him, would he give me a man to shoe [sic] me the way. I took over with me 2200 kola nuts. I asked the way was far, so bought a donkey and loaded it up: we went to Zatugu. I greeted the chief: he greeted me; he called all his friends to salute me. He said next day, he was very grateful to me for the cap and 1000 kola nuts and umbrella which I gave him: he then asked me
to buy a sheep, a fowl, a guinea fowl, I did this and bought some pito. In four days’ time he called all the people in Satugu [sic], showed them the umbrella, and distributed the kola, and they drank the pito. Ama was there; he called her, and said to all of the people “I am going to give Atawa to Kwaku” (the accused). He said “I want four cattle form you” where can I get cattle from; I am a stranger here” – so I gave him 100 ‘dollars’. I then distributed 1000 kola nuts to everyone who were [sic] there. He was the Zatugu Chief then gave me a boy to go and greet a certain men; I said “good”. He then gave his friend some kola 100 nuts; we then went to Zabri with the chief of Zatugu’s son. The chief of Zabri said he could understand Ashanti: we greeted each other and the son of the chief of Zatugu told all that had happened at Zatugu. The Zabri chief gave me a dash of a fowl. I said eating fowls is against my custom. Then I returned to Zatugu, two days or so I told the chief of Zatugu I wished to return to Bawku. But the chief of Zatugu said if you are patient I will give you another girl. I had no much food with me: when this was nearly finished I said I must go. I thanked the chief cordially; he said “wait until the girl arrives.” I said “my stomach is troubling me”; so I left Zatugu and came to Bawku. Four days later the son arrived with the girl (Ama Dankyi or Abnofo Busanga). She was taken to the Busanaba’s house; the chief of Zatugu’s sons said the chief did not know where I came from but he liked me; the Busanaba then gave the girl to me: but the chief of Zatugu said “the girl is too small;” you must regard the Busanaba as the guardians of the girls. “When the girl grows up you may give me a cow”. I must not sleep with the girls before I had brought the girls back to Zatugu where something could be done to them. I then went to Ankasi with the two girls.

Again, in his acquiring of Atawa and Abnofo, Kwaku Anin makes a point of his unfamiliarity with Busanga custom making statements such as “I am a stranger here” and “eating fowls is against my custom.” Certainly, Anin was anticipating the Magistrate would only believe a marriage transaction took in this area if it involved cattle. But by this point in the testimony we get a sense that the going rate for each girl was roughly 90 francs or 100 dollars, along with gifts of kola and other goods. The fact he brought so
many gifts back was an attempt to illustrate the financial obligations of a prospective husband. Usually, “prospective husbands were expected to compensate the bride’s family, often through labor, presents, and cash payments.” His seeming reluctance to wait for Abnofo, the third girl, completes this caricature of a hesitant and uninformed Asante man in foreign territory. Moreover, his reference to the Busanaba as the official guardian of the girls was an attempt to allow any suspicion the Magistrate may have had regarding Anin’s claim that this was a marriage transaction given the very young age of the girls. The instruction that he must not sleep with the girls before they returned to Zatugu “where something could be done to them” is a direct reference to female circumcision, of which we will hear more later in this chapter.

But was Kwaku Anin indeed telling the truth? Did he acquire the three girls through cash bride-wealth payments with a view of marrying them or at the very least the first girl, Kibadu, who was offered to him in response to his request for a wife? It is very likely that Anin was using marriage as a mask for pawning. As Philip A. Ifbafe notes of pawning cases in Benin, to avoid punishment under the ordinance both parties to the transaction would agree to tell the same bride-wealth story of denial. This worked particularly well in incidences where there existed no documentary evidence of the transaction (indeed, the very fact that no formal contract existed for pawning or marriage posed difficulties for administrators seeking to counter such stories). Yet, while this option under normal circumstances would prove a quite effective way to evade

442 Lovejoy and Falola, 12.

punishment, Anin was given an extra advantage since the Chief, with whom he
supposedly made the agreements, had recently died. Although the final report gives the
sense that the Magistrate knew this ‘bride-price’ story wasn’t legitimate, he had no way
to disprove it. In a shrewd use of the Anglo-French border, the deceased Chief’s son – the
current Chief of Zatugu – evaded attending court in Bawku by claiming difficulties with
French authorities. In the absence of the dead Chief’s son there was little other means to
disprove Anin’s statement. Thus, Busanga witnesses were brought into court to offer
testimony regarding ‘Busanga custom.’ The testimony of a farmer, Bawila Busanga, took
on a special level of importance.

5.5 “A Chief cannot give a girl away in marriage”: Bawila Busanga, a Bawku
farmer

What can be gathered from the testimony is that Anin was clearly trying to shift
blame to the Chief of Zatugu, as though he himself was helpless at the Chief’s hands.
Certainly, as an upwardly mobile Asante man, Anin would have benefited from the
accumulation of dependents in 1930s. Moreover, he would have seemed to gain from
marrying a female pawn or slave, as this would have provided him with children and
therefore more labour which he could control. Despite the fact the girls in this case were
of a very young age – Atawa described herself as “quite small, but I was able to walk” –
it was not unheard of for marriage agreements to take place this young, or even in
infancy. At this point, it is quite likely that the Magistrate’s judgment of pawning rested
on three main points: the prevalence of child pawns and trade in northern children in this
region; the fact that female children were the most suitable pawns because it was believed
that they had the least voice; and, Luwanda’s testimony which worked in tandem with
Kwaku Anin to place full weight of blame on the Chief. The power of Bawila Busanga’s testimony is that he served as both a character witness and ‘native informant.’ He knew Kwaku, saw Kwaku obtain the three girls, and he was able to state unequivocally that the Chief transgressed Busanga custom. While his testimony did little to absolve Anin it did point the finger squarely upon the Chief.

Bawila Busanga s.a.r.b. states in Moshi (Court Interpreter interpreting) I am a farmer living in Bawku. I know the accused by name Kwaku. 10 years ago I was Asatale Busanga then. He often used to lodge with me in Bawku when he came from French territory; through him I got to know the accused. Asatale told me that the accused wanted something. Asatale returned to French country. Ten days after he returned with a small girl called Kibadu, (Kibadu is identified in court). I am quite certain this is the girl. Asatale is now at zatugu [sic]. When he came to Bawku 10 years ago he gave the girl to the accused. The accused kept the girl. Shortly after he left for Kumasi with the girl accompanying him. Zatale asked the accused to pay him three cows. Later one evening I saw the man Zatale with 90 five franc notes. The following year Kwaku Anin returned with Kibadu. The accused asked me to buy a donkey for him; he asked me to send my boy to the chief of Zatugu with the accused. The accused went to French country and returned with Atawa. (Atawa is produced in court). I recognized Atawa as being the girl who accompanied the accused on his return from French country. My son is now in French territory. Four days after returning to Bawku Zatale brought another girl called Anafu (identified in court) Zatale gave Anafu to the accused. He came to my house. Some time after the accused gave Zatale 1000 kola nuts and 1/6 and 10/- for the tax for the funeral custom of the chief of Zatugu who had died. When the girls arrived I asked Zatale what their names were and he told me. In the case of Anafu she did not tell me that she had any other name; nor in the case of Kibadu, or Atawa. I know Busanga custom well: a chief cannot give a girl away in marriage, - a girl who is not related to the chief – without the consent of the mother, or the girls’ parents. I have heard of people in French country unable to pay their l’impot selling their daughters.
Here Bawila’s critique of the deceased Chief works to link the claims of Luwanda and Kwaku Anin, both of whom had accused the Chief of misconduct. While Luwanda argues the Chief exploited the helplessness of her position as a widow, Anin claims the Chief led him into an illicit transaction through the exploitation of his ignorance of Busanga custom. Bawila provides the final seal. As a character witness to Kwaku Anin as well as a Busanga man knowledgeable of customs – “I know Busanga custom well” – his testimony cements the Chief’s culpability, substantiating his conduct was indeed a transgression if not an abuse of chiefly power. Magistrate C.C.R. Amory’s concluding remarks demonstrate just how much he believed the Chief of Zatugu was to blame, going so far as to say that it was he who “caused these three girls who were then mere babies to be torn from their mothers’ side without regard to their ultimate fate, selling them into a country where for all he knew they might become victims of human sacrifice.” There is one, powerful narrative at work here. Amory’s reference to ‘human sacrifice’ demonstrates the extent to which his understandings of the internal slave trade (in which Northerners were given in tribute or outright sold as slaves to the Asante Empire) influenced his judgment of the Zatugu Chief in 1941. In this narrative, a corrupt Chief under pressure from French administrators to deliver l’impot sells young girls into slavery or “human sacrifice” for profit. The narrative of the corrupt French chief would have struck a chord with British administrators in the Northern Territories, not so much because it involves the sale of three young girls – “mere babies” – but more because the

444 Kwaku Anin vs. C.O.P., Slave Dealing 1937-48, NAGT 8/2/205. The fact that the Magistrate invoked ‘human sacrifice’ in his concluding remarks shows the extent to which he used whatever knowledge he had of the slave trade. In pre-colonial times, northerners were sent as tribute to Asante with some of them indeed serving as human sacrifice.
court spectacle exemplified colonial failures along the Anglo-French border to preserve ‘tradition’ (in this case, traditional pawnning) in the face of capitalist incursion. From a British perspective, the Kwaku Anin case represented the worst failings of the French system of ‘direct’ rule, but also Britain’s own system of ‘indirect rule’ since the girls were brought to Bawku, Anin’s base, to be trafficked southward. By the 1940s, however, indirect rule was discarded, having proved unable to contain the individual accumulation and corruption of Chiefs in which the powers of native administration were vested and upon which colonial development depended.

5.6 “Unscrupulous men”, profit-making, and the maintenance of ‘free labour’ in the Gold Coast

By the time Kwaku Anin was charged in 1941, administrators had already begun to move away from ‘indirect rule’ as a tool for developing the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. We remember from previous chapters that indirect rule in the Northern Territories was at best a flawed system. Inspired from the musings of Lugard and his protégés Cameron, Perham, and others, systems of native administration were implemented in uneven and experimental ways throughout early colonial British Africa. However imperfect, colonial attempts at native administration in the Northern Territories adopted what could be called core tenents of the system, including the amalgamation of people into “tribes.” With the help of anthropologists, development was to remain gradual, and along African lines. This so-called ‘gradualism’ – a vague mutation of 19th century racial evolutionism – would ensure the Northern Territories was set back on its natural course of development previously disrupted by the slave trade.

445 Grischow, 137.
By the 1940s, however, it was clear that indirect rule had failed to achieve these ends: the system of native administration had failed to reconcile colonial desires to maintain ‘community’ with capitalist incursion. As Klein and Roberts observe, the heightened demand for cash to pay taxes and purchase goods no longer produced locally resulted in a “greater commercialization of both labor and goods.”

This commercialization of labor was particularly worrisome for Northern Territories administrators who became particularly concerned with what they referred to as a tendency toward ‘profit-making’ in the trafficking of northern labor to the south. In one report from 1948, profit-making is linked with earlier concerns regarding the trade in northern children, stating that “small boys” were falling prey to those “unscrupulous people from the South” engaged in illegal recruiting of labour.

The reference to “unscrupulous people from the South” implies that particular people – southerners in this case – had begun capitalizing on the transition of the West African interior to wage-labour. The problem was that with the development of the cocoa industry in the Gold Coast a circular migrant labour regime had been established and migrant labourers from the North and the French interior worked for wages on a contract basis.

In this process many free labourers travelled south sometimes at the behest of traffickers who would make a tidy profit on their transportation. Whether these laborers were indeed ‘free’ or coerced in some form of dependency was in some way unclear; the very fact that full

\footnote{Klein and Roberts, 417.}

\footnote{Colonial Secretary’s Office, Accra, 22 December 1947, Re: “Pawning of Persons as security for Debt”. 24 August 1948, Slave Dealing 1937-48 (relative file NRG RAGT 8/2/204 Domestic Slavery, 1928), NAGT 8/2/205}

\footnote{Grischow, Shaping Tradition, 52.}
alienation of wage-labor (dependent on market forces) did not take root in the North ensured that coercive forms of labour – such as pawning – continued. Thus the alienation of pawns was incomplete, and pawning continued in regions where wage-labour was marginal or non-existent.\(^449\) Not surprisingly, in the North wage labour was synonymous with migrant labor and the lines between coerced and free remained very blurred.

One case from 1936 illustrates the challenges of commercialized labour particularly well. Here, an Asante man named Mr. Akrong was tried in Koforidua, Eastern Province for slave dealing in Northerners.\(^450\) The Northerners involved were listed by their ‘tribal’ surnames, listing as five Busanga males, two Busanga females, two Moshie [sic] males and two Kusasi males:

1. Napasi Busanga
2. Dango Busanga
3. Billa Busanga (age 22)
4. Narba Busanga
5. Alarle Busanga
6. Billa Moshie (aged 19)
7. Sumalugu Moshie (aged 18)
8. Agueri Kusasi
9. Auga Kusasi
10. Asiliga Busanga (woman)
11. Atini Busanga (woman)

From the transcript of the proceedings it seems the judgment of Detective, Corporeal Ampeah, to acquit the accused was guided by a few key factors. As we learned earlier from our discussion of female pawning in Bawku, treatment of labour was very important

\(^{449}\) Lovejoy and Falola, 8.

\(^{450}\) Akuse Police office, 3 August, 1936 to the Commissioner of Police, Eastern Province, Koforidua, “Alleged Slave Dealing at Somanya”, *Domestic Slavery*, NAGT 8/2/204
and likewise Ampeah made note that each of the labourers in question appeared “healthy and contented” and were “well treated by their employers.” Second, Ampeah was able to demonstrate that the workers were indeed paid. The rate of pay was noted at approximately 4 or 3 pounds per annum, exclusive of board, lodging and clothing, which were supplied freely by the plantation owners in agreement with Mr. Akrong. Establishing the rate of pay was most decisive to Akrong’s acquittal since it served as evidence of a contract. In discerning ‘free’ labour, this evidence was imperative. It is for this very reason that pawning remained so ambiguous since, unlike free labour where agreed upon wages served as contracts, and slavery where the master-slave relationship was that the slave was literally ‘owned,’ the debt served as the only contract and the pawn was neither ‘owned’ nor ‘free.’ Yet, the unspoken contract for pawns to be treated well and given food, shelter, and clothes in return for work was considered by many administrators to be a form of contract, as under Masters and Servants Ordinance and therefore looked upon benignly.

The evidence of good treatment and an annual wage was enough to convince Ampeah that Mr. Akrong was not guilty of slave dealing. Indeed, there was “nothing, according to the circumstances of this case, to be termed as slave dealing,” and in his opinion the simple “importation of these people from Waga [sic, Ouagadougou] and Bawku to the Gold Coast to be employed as labourers did not constitute” such.\(^\text{451}\) However, while not guilty of slave dealing Akrong was, in Ampeah’s judgment, guilty of profit-making, specifically “profit-making by conveying the people for transport fees.”\(^\text{452}\)

\(^{451}\) Ibid.

\(^{452}\) Ibid.
Clearly, this seemed to colonial officials a matter of *transporting*, rather than slave dealing since in Ampeah’s opinion it would have been ‘impossible for Mr. Akrong to collect so many people at one time from their homes either at their will or by force to convey for sale without any resistance or protest being offered by their relatives, the native chiefs and the Government authorities.’ Clearly, once any traces of ‘coercion’ were dispelled, the workers were deemed ‘free.’ This of course was the preferred outcome for administrators who sought not to highlight de Graft Johnson’s unfulfilled assurance from 1927 that ‘hoary customs like domestic slavery’ would change with the transition to wage-labour and the development of agricultural and other industries. While there was a moral judgment placed upon profit-making, crucially this judgment was not criminal. Like Kwaku Anin, Mr. Akrong was merely found to be yet another ‘unscrupulous’ trader from the south taking advantage of the increasingly urbanized, cash-economy of 1930s Ghana.

5.7 ‘Redemption’, paternalism, and the re-assertion of lineage structures

When exiting the preserved dungeons of Cape Coast Castle there is a sign which reads “Door of No Return.” It was a sign put there by the British, which today signifies the cruel, dark history of the Atlantic Slave Trade. In recent times, a second sign has been erected by the Ghanaian state. This one, upon re-entry into the dungeons states “Door of Return.” For many visiting the Castle, the signs serve as chilling reminders of the horrors of slavery, the reality that many in fact were ripped from their homes, never to return. However, it is also a reminder that however cruel and awful domestic slavery or ‘pawning’ were, these forms of dependency differed, in that pawns could be redeemed by kin. While many were trapped in servitude, far away from their ancestral lands, others
broke free through their own or their relatives’ work or strategies. We know that for women held in domestic slavery, this was often very difficult, particularly for those who fought to regain their freedom in colonial courts at the turn of the century, such as Abina in Trevor Getz’s recent graphic history, *Abina and the Important Men* where it seems at every turn ‘important men’ whether Chiefs, Magistrates, or plantation owners, worked to prevent women from gaining autonomy.\(^{453}\)

While the Anin transcript seems to indicate that the widow Luwanda and the three girls were provided space to use their own voice in court the final decision of the Magistrate demonstrates that there were concrete limits to how far women’s desires would be considered in their redemption. Certainly, the redemption of Atawa at the clever pleading of her widowed mother, Luwanda, serves as an important example among a growing literature demonstrating African women’s successful use of colonial courts. However, for the two other girls, Kibadu and Abnofo the colonial order to return to male, Busanga lineage structure may not have been ideal. Here we must remember that the three girls had been living in the Asante region for an entire decade during which time they had taken Asante names. Interestingly, it was common for slaves to be given new names. Atawa Busanga took the ‘alias’ of Akwesia Sekyereh and Kibadu Busanga became known as Ama Yeboa [sic], while Abnofu Busanga was Ama Dankyeh. The giving of ‘Busanga’ as a surname was a product of colonial taxonomy, an easy short-form way to identify which tribe Africans belonged to in the North. However, while in Asante, the girls took on both Asante surnames and common names, with each girl being

given a different surname. In colonial litigation, this re-naming of the girls implied a particular subjectivity or state of ‘belonging’. The tension between where they were ‘from,’ where they had ‘been’ and where they ‘belonged’ was not lost on the widow Luwanda who made note of it in her testimony stating that while she recognized her “because of the marks on her face and on her stomach I put when she was a baby” her Asante name did not fit in the redemption narrative of belonging: “I called her Atawa; she had no other name.”

The fact the girls had taken on Asante names points to their fuller integration into Asante societal structure. In the trafficking case mentioned earlier involving Mr. Akrong and trafficked labourers from the North, the colonial transcript only mentions the labourers ‘northern’ names, that is, their first names along with their tribe as surname. While this observation could be explained simply by the relative insignificance of the case compared to that of Kwaku Anin, or it could point to the girls’ fuller integration in Asante society and the possibility that this integration resembled a status that was more domestic slave than pawn. Martin Klein and Richard Roberts have noted that while pawns and slaves did similar work, the integral difference between the two was that the pawn remained a member of the original lineage.\footnote{Klein and Roberts, 409-426.} Most importantly, they could be redeemed at any time since they remained in the area and kept their own names.\footnote{Ibid.} However, as Lovejoy and Falola also note, when pawns “crossed cultural boundaries” (as the three girls here did) there was an increased chance of further alienation than when

\footnote{Klein and Roberts, 409-426.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
they were closer to their relatives and remained in contact. While the Asst. District Commissioner’s reference to the increase in pawning of Busanga girls across the border to Bawku may have indeed reflected a more traditional, localized form of pawning, the girls in the Anin case reveal just how difficult it was to distinguish between domestic slave and pawn at times of hardship and famine in depression-era West Africa.

The complex questions surrounding slavery, pawning, and bride-wealth affected the girls’ redemption and the necessity for court translators further imply a withering connection with Busanga lineage structure. After a decade of being held in bondage in the south, all three of the girls admitted that they did not know the Busanga language anymore. This is demonstrated by the fact that both Atawa and Kibadu used the Asante language to give their testimonies, while Abnofo chose to speak in Twi. Of course, there is nothing to suggest that the girls could not relate to both Busanga and Asante identities easily; to assume this would be tantamount to placing them in the pejorative colonial tribal ‘straightjacket.’ But it is not surprising that this confusion regarding the girls’ redemption within their original lineage clearly perplexed the colonial Magistrate, who decided to postpone the final judgment until the police had found the ‘parents’ of Kibadu and Abnofo.

Kungarsanga s.a.r.b. states in Moshi, I am a farmer at Zatugu. I do not know the accused. I know Abnofo (Abnofo brought into court) who is my niece; but she is called Butaw in my country. I am quite certain she is my niece; the daughter of my elder brother Zamerima, -he is the chief of Zatugu; he could not come because if he come the French authorities could create trouble. Forpado is the name of the girls’ mother but she died about nine years

456 Lovejoy and Falola, 14.
ago; before Butaw was taken away. 8 years ago the present chief Zamerima was court messenger to the French Commandant: at Tenkoudougou. 7 years ago when Zamerima and I returned from Tenkoudougou we were told that the girl had been given to somebody: - sold to be more exact. The old chief had sold the girl; he was my step brother. We quarreled about this. We asked the chief Desanaba where the girl was: he said he did not know. Five years ago the chief Desanaba died, but the accused did not come to the funeral custom: I have never seen him before today. Until yesterday I came to Bawku and saw Abnofo. I have never heard her called Ama Dankyi, which is not a Busanga name.

No questions.

Lali Busanga s.a.r.b. state in Hausa. I am a labourer in Bawku I know the accused by sight; also by name Kwaku. I know Kibadu (identified in court) (alias Ama Yeboah). She is my cousin; (my uncle’s daughter) Kuka is his name; but he is dead now; he died five years ago. The girl’s mother’s name is Kabazaa; she died nine years ago. The last time I saw the girl was 13 years ago; 14 years ago I was in Kumasi where I had gone from Zatugu. Kuka and Kabazaa parents of the girl Kibadu were all in Zatugu. When I was in Kumasi I heard that Kibadu had been sold by the chief to an Ashanti man. I have been home to Zatugu from Bawku, about 8 years ago. The chief of Zatugu, Zamerima told me the story about the sale of the girl by the dead chief was true. I went to Zatugu for the funeral custom of Kuka Kibadu’s father. I did not give evidence as I was afraid the girl might say she did not know me because she was very young when she last saw me. If a girl is promised to me, but she is too young, she does not leave her own compound according to our custom; except for a visit of one or two days.

Certainly, the testimonies of Lali and Kungarsanga work to further indemnify the deceased Chief and his role in the sale of the girls to Kwaku Anin. Moreover, Lali’s concluding sentence especially undermines Anin’s claim that the girls were part of a marriage transaction. But what is most telling about the guardians’ testimonies is the extent to which their very inclusion in the transcript works to demonstrate the colonial
state’s desire to restore the girls to a paternalistic male Busanga lineage structure. Despite conflicting evidence, this was the colonial administrator’s intuitive reaction. The move to wait until the ‘parents’ of the Kibadu and Abnofo were found reflects the Magistrate C.C.R Amory’s hesitation to conclude that the girls were indeed slaves, which would negate a sustained connection to their original lineage structure and right as pawns to be claimed and redeemed by their male kin. As he explained to the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, “I have no doubt in my own mind that these girls were ‘slaves’…I say slaves in inverted commas advisedly – for the accepted meaning of slave with all the harshness and cruelty it implies could not be applied to the treatment of these girls.”

The focus on ‘treatment’ was common in litigation, but emphasis on where (and with whom) the girls should be placed is exemplary of how officials distinguished between female servitude from slavery. Here, the notion of slavery often took on a male preserve in the eyes of male colonial administrators who believed females were more readily absorbed in households. Moreover, it also reflected popular colonial perceptions that ‘freedom’ for women was reuniting with kinsmen or close friends in their cultural homeland. As we have seen, Atawa clearly wanted to return to her mother Luwanda and made a point of mentioning her ill treatment while working on the farm in Ankasi. Of course, the fact that Kibadu and Abnofo’s biological parents were deceased factored as prominently in their ‘return’ to male relatives as it did in their original ‘sale’ to Anin ten years prior. The Magistrate’s decision to restore all three girls

457 Wright, 172.

458 Ibid
to Busanga lineages powerfully reflected a colonial commitment to buttress structures that capital had de-structured; Bawku had been a veritable hub of trade in livestock, salt, and kola and by the 1930s it was fairly densely populated and had a large, heterogeneous ‘floating’ population. As Marcia Wright notes of similar conditions in turn-of-the-century Central Africa, women who became pawns often had little recourse to kin and were not lineage-controlled and within this quickly urbanizing polyethnic context, ‘slavery’ became a feature of a relatively ‘open’ society.\textsuperscript{459} In this way, Wright's findings suggest that by placing the pawned girls back with their male relatives, the magistrate was attempting to restore the lineage-control that capital had previously de-structured.

However, in a move that reflects women and girls’ increasing negotiation of the colonial courts, the young Kibadu made a clever case against this effort to return her to male, Busanga lineage-control. Rather than return to her cousin Lali who came forth to claim her, she preferred to continue to “follow Kwaku,” whom she claimed to be her husband.

\textit{Kibadu Busanga (alias Ama Yeboa) s.a.r.b. states in Ashanti:}

\begin{quote}
I am a girl living in Ankasi. I used to help in farming. I know the accused Kwaku Anin by name. He is my husband. I cannot remember how long I have been with him. I am a Bawku girl: my mother brought me forth here. I did not know who my mother is or was; -my father is called Kuka. I should not recognize my father if I saw him. I lived for a long time in Bawku before going to Ankasi. I am a Busanga by tribe. I know myself that I am a Busanga, but I cannot speak Busanga. I like Ankasi more than Bawku. I have been well treated by Kwaku I am not a bit curious to know about my father and mother in Bawku. I want to follow Kwaku.\textsuperscript{460}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{459} Ibid., 152.

\textsuperscript{460} Kwaku Anin vs. C.O.P., \textit{Slave Dealing 1937-48}, in NAGT 8/2/205
In fighting to ‘follow Kwaku’ rather than return to her kin, Kibadu’s testimony can be read as seeking to break free from the control of indigenous and colonial male networks that often worked in tandem to control young women from turning ‘wayward’. Here, she has no problem laying claim to her identity as both Busanga and ‘Bawku girl.’ However, she is also clear in her statement that she herself prefers Ankasi to Bawku, and wishes to stay there with the defendant, her husband. At the conclusion of the trial, her plea proved so convincing that the Magistrate made a note of it to the Chief Commissioner stating that he would not be surprised if Kibadu probably ended up marrying Kwaku Anin. Yet, despite personal preferences Kibadu was formally ordered by the Magistrate to return to her cousin Lali, illustrating the limits to which women’s voices were effectively considered in colonial courts. The fact the Magistrate still believed Kibadu would ‘follow’ Kwaku demonstrates that what was put on paper counted more than social reality. As for the Abnofo and Atawa, we know very little of what happened to them after their redemption or return. The Magistrate only notes that they seem ‘very happy’ and content with the judgment, an observation that could have come out of arrangements made by them behind the scenes.\(^{461}\)

The conviction of Kwaku Anin on the lesser count of pawning combined with the condemnation of the French Chief of Zatugu and the redemption of Atawa, Abnofo, and Kibadu to Busanga lineage structure works to accomplish three things. First, the conviction of Anin gives the appearance that by the 1940s the Gold Coast government is actually taking slave dealing cases in the Northern Territories seriously. Second, the Magistrate’s decision to convict demonstrates that while these cases were considered

serious enough to prosecute, they were nevertheless still dealt with leniently. Kwaku Anin, for example, was fined only 25 pounds each and given the alternative of three months’ imprisonment. He was given a month to pay, which was swiftly extended to payment in installments over the closing months of that year. The leniency with which the court treated Kwaku Anin demonstrated by fines he was ordered to pay reflected how the Magistrate believed the girls were well treated while in Ankasi. It also reflected the Magistrate’s belief that the girls were only ‘slaves’ in “inverted commas.” Third, the court’s condemnation of the Chief played upon latent Anglo-French border disputes, and worked to illustrate the French native administration as corrupt. Finally, the ‘redemption’ of the three girls back to Busanga territory helped to resolve this, at least on paper. The girls were sent back to their lineage structure much in the same way administrator’s sought to set the North back on its original, evolutionary development.

5.8 “I used to cry because I had marks and other girls had not”: tribal marks and female circumcision as measures of ‘foreign-ness’

Yet, there is one, conspicuous matter in the court proceedings that does not fit well with this narrative of redemption. We know from the Magistrate’s concluding remarks that the girls were to have female circumcision performed on them upon their return to Busanga. It is further revealed in Anin’s testimony that he was instructed not to sleep with the girls before they returned to ‘have something done to them.’ Curiously, the Magistrate did not write of his discomfort or of any attempt to dissuade the girls’ guardians from performing the procedure. It seems that in C.C.R. Amory’s eyes, the girls were from French Territory and therefore conducting ‘foreign’ practices outside of British jurisdiction. As we have seen throughout this thesis, the belief that female
circumcision was an outsider practice brought in by foreigners had long existed in the minds of Gold Coast administrators. The fact that at least one of the Busanga girls, Atawa, had tribal marks that distinguished her as a ‘northerner’ or in pre-colonial Asante terms an ‘outsider’ of slave status, secured her foreigner status:

I am a girl also known as Akwesia Sekyereh living in Ankasi, near Kumasi. I work in the farm. I know the accused Kwaku Anin by name; I have known him a long time; he came to my country. He took kola there. Two men came to get l’impot money in our house. My mother’s foot had swollen: She could not go out to get food. “How can I get money to pay l’impot she said. The two men returned: the following day the chief’s son came and took me to the chief’s house; I was taken by force: I saw the accused with some kola. In three days’ time I was given to the accused to go to the Gold Coast. I was very sad to go; I saw that I had done nothing wrong yet I was taken to chiefs [sic] house. We left Zatugu and came to Bawku. I was quite small, but I was old enough to walk. Since then I have been at Ankasi; I lived with the accused’s senior wife. I used to do farm work; I got no pay. I got good food and I was well treated: I was given clothes –two cover cloths – I was occasionally beaten if I did not do my work properly. I used to cry because I had marks and other girls had not. The other girls used to make fun of me and say I had cheeks like calabash. Generally speaking I was not happy. I did not try to run away because I did not know the road, if I had known the road I should have run away. I did not know the name of my town; I only know my fathers [sic] name not my mothers [sic]: my father’s name is Yaruba, but he died while I was still in my mother’s womb. I know my mother (Luwanda Busanga identified) by sight.

Atawa’s testimony that the other girls used to make fun of her and say she had ‘cheeks like a calabash’ is reminiscent of pre-colonial slavery in Asante and the importance of tribal markings in distinguishing those who were ‘free’ from those who were slaves of northern origin. As Raymond E. Dummet explains, there was a common term in Twi – odonko – that was increasingly used in the 19th century south to refer to persons from
northern polities such as Wa, Gonja, Dagomba, Chakosi, or Mamprusi who were captured in warfare or purchased on the market as slaves. However, in its traditional connotation, the term simply meant ‘foreigner,’ or someone who was identified as being of northern origin because of his or her tribal markings. That Atawa was teased for her tribal markings indicates the extent to which Northern laborers were still considered odonko, even to the 1930s. While the Magistrate convicted Anin on charges of pawning, it was clear that he considered the girls ‘slaves,’ if only in inverted commas. Their ‘redemption’ to Busanga lineage was symbolic in that it represented a return to their original lineage, a lineage from which they had been alienated for roughly a decade. The Magistrate’s decision to return the girls despite the fact they were to undergo female circumcision demonstrates how this return to lineage structure took precedence over the voice of at least one of the girls, Kibadu. Certainly, while the Magistrate may have demonstrated concern for the three girls ‘torn from their mothers,’ this concern was limited to what the Gold Coast government thought within its responsibility. As the Gold Coast colony marched toward independence, rather than reflect pre-colonial power relations between Asante and its tributary states, the discourse of ‘foreigners’ came to be artificially defined by European-imposed borders.

5.9 ‘Foreign-ness’, Female Circumcision, and French labour

In 1949, the Gold Coast government proclaimed female circumcision to be a foreigner practice. In the years following the Kwaku Anin case, international interest in

female circumcision revived as activists in Britain were eager to hear of the progress of eradication efforts in Britain’s African colonies. Responding to questions of progress outlined in ‘Sudan Female Circumcision’, Northern Territories administrators proclaimed that in the Gold Coast, female circumcision was considered a foreigner practice because of its prevalence among tribes inhabiting the border, such as Nankanni, Sissalla, Lobi, Dagarti and Wala, and Moshis, Busangas and Yangas, peoples defined as “natives of the Haute Volta, but who settle in considerable numbers in the Gold Coast.”463 The report went on to state that previous efforts at propaganda had done little to stop the practice and that clearly education was the only solution, since penal legislation would only ‘drive it underground.”464

This 1949 designation of female circumcision as ‘foreign’ works to tell us more about colonial attitudes toward the border than it does the borderland groups blamed for its spread. As we saw earlier, in 1933 Asst. D.C. J.K.G. Syme of Bawku reported the practice as spreading in Kusasi district, especially among Kusasis, encouraged by neighboring Yangas in Bawku. In response, the Bawkunaba assured Syme that while he could not dissuade the Busanga and Yangas from the practice, he would not let it get a hold among the Kusasis and local Mamprussis.465 According to Syme, many in the district of Kusasi practiced the custom, including Moshis, Busangas, and Yangas and he blamed the adoption of the custom among the Kusasi on the influence of these groups –

463 Acting Chief Commissioner to Colonial Secretary Accra, ‘Sudan Female circumcision’, Female Excision (Circumcision), NAGT 8/2/34

464 Ibid.

465 J.K. G. Syme, Assistant. District Commissioner, Bawku Informal Diary, Mamprussi District, 5 January 1933, NAGA 57/5/1
groups he called ‘outsiders.’”\textsuperscript{466} The agreement between Syme’s then parochial remarks and those of the Gold Coast government in 1949 is remarkable. Not only were Busanga peoples such as Atawa, Abnofo, and Kibadu representative of the existence of the practice in the British Gold Coast, but the reasons behind their cross-border settlement were conveniently unaddressed. Like so many others from colonies adjacent to the Gold Coast, these three girls were brought into British Territory as labourers. Regardless of differences in status as slaves or pawns, the three girls, much like the labourers trafficked by the ‘unscrupulous’ Mr. Akrong, were brought into British lands either to work on farms in the south, or like the many Busanga girl-pawns living in Bawku, to fulfill debts incurred by the kin. It was this steady stream of labour the Gold Coast colony depended and it seems paradoxical that the colonial government would reserve such foreigner rhetoric for groups that were not otherwise divided by borders prior to European rule.

What then did this foreigner rhetoric accomplish? It seems that labeling female circumcision as a foreign practice allowed the Gold Coast government to evade international pressure regarding legislation. Since the 1930s, the Gold Coast government had resisted any attempts to legislate against customs tied to marriage, household economy, and lineage structure. This was a hesitation that lay at the core of reluctance to reform pawning, since most pawns were girls and women, as well as female circumcision.\textsuperscript{467} Moreover, as a practice perceived to be tied to the borderlands, legislation would effectively mean some sort of border control. Given the high rates of

\textsuperscript{466} District Commissioner’s Office, Kusasi District, Bawku, Northern Territories, 18 March 1933, ‘Clitoridectomy’, \textit{Female Excision (Circumcision)}, 1930-33, NAGT 3

\textsuperscript{467} Klein and Roberts, 412.
inter-marriage between borderland groups in the north-east, this sort of control would be virtually impossible. The Gold Coast’s decision to effectively place the practice outside of its legal jurisdiction reflected the greater importance placed on maintaining open borders for the sake of labour. This becomes all the more clear when one considers the extent to which borderland districts relied on labour from French territories for local projects. As one Bawku administrator reported to the Commissioner of Labour in 1948, much of the local labour force was composed of ex-soldiers from French territory who would simply “stay with their own tribes in the town.” 468 In this way, we may view such exclusionary rhetoric as yet another demonstration of the colonial government’s development priorities; rather than legislate against any ‘undesirable’ by-products of cross-border labour migration, the Gold Coast government simply eschewed responsibility. In this way, the north-eastern border exemplifies what Nugent and Asiwaju call “the paradox of African boundaries,” an understanding that “since Africans were subjects, and not citizens, flexibility posed no great philosophical problems.” 469 The fact that under colonial rule European borders could mean different things at different times allowed for a Busanga woman in Bawku to exist on paper as a foreigner one day, a labourer the next, and a market woman from French Territory tomorrow. At the level of colonial discourse – but certainly not reality – whatever policy was desired at the moment, the frontiers and their people would be made to suit.

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468 Asst. D. C. Bawku to G.N. Burden, Commissioner of Labour, Chief Commissioner’s Office, Accra, 17 February 1948, Kusasi Affairs, in [NAGT not legible]

5.10 “The frontiers should be made to suit the policy, not vice versa”: Controlling Mobility in post-war Northern Ghana

That the Gold Coast government refused to introduce legislation that could stem labour migration did not mean it shied away from regulating movement. In fact, around the same time that officials proclaimed female circumcision a foreign practice we begin to see the issuing of travel documents on a scale previously unknown in Bawku. It seems that while in the 1930s Asst. D.C. Syme remarked on Bawku’s enormous ‘floating population’ by the 1940s mobility through Bawku had become more regulated by the colonial state. This increased regulation first came to light from the incredible influx of applications in 1944. A confused Asst. D. C. Anderson wrote to Accra asking what forms of identification people should have, complaining “The people here have suddenly become Passport conscious… There is considerable trade across the frontier here, and many traders make frequent journeys in French Territory on to Nigeria overland.” It is not surprising the local populace became aware of these new travel regulations even before local administrators in Bawku. It seems that at this time, French administrators had begun to tighten controls on mobility, including the entry of travelers from the Gold Coast.

470 Chief Commissioner’s Office, Tamale to Colonial Secretary Accra, 30 October, 1948, Anglo-French Relations, in NAGT 8/38/2

471 Immigration – Natives (Issue of Passports, Etc), in NAGT 5/19/1

472 Asst. D. C. Bawku, Kusasi, D.A. Anderson to F.F. de C. duSautoy Esqr., Passport Officer, Secretariat, Accra. 3 July, 1944, Immigration – Natives (Issue of Passports, Etc), NAGT 5/19/1

473 Secretariat Accra to D.A. Anderson, Asst. D.C. Bawku, Kusasi, 19 July 1944, Immigration – Natives (Issue of Passports, Etc), NAGT 5/19/1
Certainly, the adjudication of cases involving traders and trafficking, such as Kwaku Anin, had always been handled with as much political sensitivity as possible so as not to distress Anglo-French co-operation or communities straddling both sides of the border. But, by the 1940s, for those traversing the border on a regular basis, getting caught in French West Africa without a travel certificate was problematic. While travel certificates were not mandatory for travel in West Africa, they were certainly encouraged by the Gold Coast government. Pilgrims en route to Mecca in 1944, for example, were instructed to apply for passports and pay a fee of 20 pounds, which went straight to the colonial government’s coffers. For travelers residing outside of the Gold Coast there was a document called a ‘laissez passer’. It seems these ‘laissez-passers’ were mostly provided to Nigerians to “help get them home” while travelers described as ‘natives of the Gold Coast’ were instructed to apply for a travel certificate which one would only receive after undergoing a background check by local Police. This meant that by 1944, a trader like Kwaku Anin who would have formerly passed through Bawku with little difficulty was now made to submit to an investigation by the Bawku police. In the Northern Territories, the busiest towns along the borders were given forms in order to expedite the process. They were Tamale, Navrongo, Bawku, Lawra, Bole, Wa, and Yendi. The applications for both the travel certificate and laissez passer were quite extensive and in both cases establishing the identity of the applicant was of prime

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474 “Translation. Travel Between British West African Colonies and French West Africa and Togoland,” Immigration – Natives (Issue of Passports, Etc), NAGT 5/19/1

475 “Travel Certificates and Laissez Passers” from the Office of the Commissioner (Criminal Investigations Division), the Gold Coast Police, Accra 4 August, 1944 to Asst. D. C. Zu urządzenia and Asst. D.C. Bawku via Chief Commissioner’s Office, Tamale, 5 September 1944, Immigration – Natives (Issue of Passports, Etc), NAGT 5/19/1
importance. The applicant was made to supply sureties of financial standing in the event of their “becoming destitute in the colony for which the travel certificates are required”; two references who could give statements to the Police to establish the names of father and mother, place of birth of father and mother, place of birth of applicant, the object of applicant’s journey, and a reference regarding the applicant’s character. In a nod to the special attention given to the control of women in border areas, it was noted that additional “care must be exercised to establish that applicants are not prostitutes.” On the other hand, much care was given not to inconvenience male labourers and traders. Clearly, the emphasis was on controlling, rather than obstructing movement and this control was gendered.476

Despite the introduction of travel certificates in the 1940s, movement and mobility in post-war West Africa remained open and unobstructed. In fact, the end of the war marked a new era in Anglo-French regional co-operation. As one Northern Territories administrator remarked, it was as though the Secretary of State had gone as far as he could “without actually saying that frontiers imposed on us by the scramble in Africa in the ‘90s do not exist.”477 Moreover, British and French district administrators on the ground were encouraged to exchange information and work in closer contact in a way that resembled “something less than consultation and something more than the mere

476 There were, of course, glitches in this system as it was noted that people who applied for certificates to travel to Sierra Leone were often catching ships in Freetown bound for UK or America.

477 Chief Commissioner’s Office, Northern Territories, Tamale to the Colonial Secretary, Accra, 30 October, 1948, Anglo-French Relations, NAGT 8/38/2
exchange of information.\textsuperscript{478} In the opinion of some, this change was long awaited. As the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories reflected, the new emphasis on co-operation on the ground would “bring home at once that the Gold Coast is not an island but an integral part of a Continent.”\textsuperscript{479} Committees, most notably the African Studies Branch, were to be set up with an eye toward fostering collaboration and information sharing. It was a change that some Northern officials felt accurately reflected realities on the ground. As the Chief Commissioner’s report continued:

One must realize that what grows more and more important is that the people living on each side of the frontiers are all Africans and closely related and allied and that what grows less and less important is that one side is mauve and the other pink… Co-operation should be interpreted as meaning what it says – working together.\textsuperscript{480}

Yet, this renewed interest in regional co-operation was as much an outcome of the Second World War as it was a necessity. The war’s end made it all the more clear that independence was inevitable. The Gold Coast government was forced to prepare for the colony’s transition. This of course meant exploiting raw materials and cheap labour to the furthest extent possible; it was a task that did not allow for any one colony to act as an ‘island’ in the region. As one despatch explains:

\textit{…the British and French territories in West Africa will not be able to develop in isolation from each other; indeed its political evolution proceeds the contacts between these peoples are likely to become increasingly numerous.}

\textsuperscript{478} A. Creech Jones, Colonial Office, The Church House, Great Smith Street, London, S.W.1 to Governor, Sir Gerald Creasy, 9 August 1948, \textit{Anglo-French Relations}, NAGT 8/38/2

\textsuperscript{479} Chief Commissioner’s Office, Northern Territories, Tamale to the Colonial Secretary, Accra, 30 October, 1948, \textit{Anglo-French Relations}, NAGT 8/38/2

\textsuperscript{480} Ibid.
Developments in French and British Territory, as the case may be, and the actions of the British or French administrations will therefore have an increasing influence on the course of events on the other side of the frontier. Both Governments aim at the ultimate self-government of the West African Territories in close association with Western Europe and even from our own point of view it is impossible to imagine this end being achieved without the process being to some degree influenced for better or for worse by events in neighboring territories. 481

Indeed, as nationalist sentiments increased and the need to ‘develop’ the estates became all the more pressing in light of post-war rebuilding, European powers moved to closer collaboration. As it faced pressure from Britain to produce more raw materials and earn money, the Gold Coast government looked toward its final push for developing the Northern Territories. The movement from ‘community’ to ‘collectivization’ reflected a natural extension of development doctrine in the region. However, it was also a scheme that was as much about the northern borderlands as it was about the Colony’s dogged determination to finally make the Northern Territories profitable.

5.11 Famine, Pawning, and ‘collectivization’ along the Northern Borderlands

In 1948, the Gold Coast government was again forced to explain the continuance of pawning along its northern borders. Rather than discuss pawning as a function of payments of debts, pawning was simply explained by famine, noted as common “only in those areas along the Northern Frontier where famine or semi-famine conditions” often prevailed. 482 This logic followed that along the northern frontier where famine or semi-

481 A. Creech Jones, Colonial Office, The Church House, Great Smith Street, London, S.W.1 to Governor, Sir Gerald Creasy, 9 August 1948, Anglo-French Relations, NAGT 8/38/2

482 Acting Chief Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, Accra, “Pawning of Persons as security for Debt,” 24 August 1948, Slave Dealing 1937-48, in NAGT 8/2/205
famine conditions existed pawns were a medium of exchange for food and therefore a
‘natural’ economic reality. As we saw in the Kwaku Anin case, famine, drought,
commercialization of goods and labour, and taxes all worked to encourage pawning –as
well as slavery – in the West African interior. Certainly, these factors continued to
contribute to its persistence in the Northern Territories. However, the singular
explanation of pawning worked to buttress colonial initiatives for development in the
region. This could be seen as early as 1927, when de Graft Johnson defined pawning as a
relatively benign institution that would inevitably die out with the development of
agriculture. By 1948 it seems colonial officials sought to use famine as an excuse for
asserting greater trusteeship over agricultural development schemes in the North.

According to Martin Klein and Richard Roberts, famine served as the basis for
colonial administrators’ traditional explanation for pawning and the persistence of
pawning in the northern interior of West Africa. 483 However, this explanation of pawning
as a product of ‘natural’ elements such as famine did not only serve to mollify
metropolitan concerns but also provided a window for colonial officials to justify pre-
existing plans for developing agriculture along the northern borderlands of the Gold
Coast. Until the 1940s, colonial officials had focused on small-scale, subsistence
production because this was a source of labour; at the same time, they ever wary of
encouraging the wage-earning, detribalized milieu found in the south. However, with the
demise of ‘indirect-rule’ as a blueprint for the North, administrators began looking
toward large-scale schemes. The fact that Africans along the borderlands were
themselves starving had little bearing on this change. As early as the 1910s we can read

483 Klein and Roberts, 411.
informal diary entries from D.C.’s stationed in the north-east discussing starving Africans wandering in search of food. Periodic famine resulting from crop failure plagued the region, stemming primarily from bouts of drought, locusts and other ‘natural’ occurrences. In order to answer the question ‘what changed’ or why officials decided now, in the 1940s to launch large-scale agricultural schemes, we must first understand the view of colonial administrators at the outset of the ‘second colonial occupation’ in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast.

Certainly, the desire to make the North more profitable was far from novel. Earlier, Governor Guggisberg had pushed hard for a northern railway which would connect the region with the south and facilitate the infrastructure needed for developing the less fertile region of the North. Time and time again, colonial visions for development schemes were drawn-up, mused-over, and eventually discarded. It was generally believed that the region’s utility would lie primarily in its wealth in people, not in things. In reconciling the North with its fate, colonial officials sought to preserve household economy to the furthest extent possible. This meant keeping subsistence agriculture going whilst young men were away on the plantations and keeping women in rural areas at home. Practices deemed from a colonial anthropological perspective to be cultural or traditional in origin were to be preserved and in all cases, the ‘detribalization’ that was thought to dislocate community or social cohesion, was blocked. The fact that this attempt to insulate the North was unsuccessful is but one illustration of how indirect rule failed to do what it had, at least in theory, intended. As Jeff Grischow observes, the
system had failed to promote and preserve African community, as chiefs and land priests used the system for their own, individual political and economic gain.

Despite the failings of native administration, the seeming shift to the 1940s emphasis on state-driven communal production - ‘collectivization’ - from an early colonial gradualist, community-centered approach was more an extension of early thinking than a transition. The reality remained that certain areas of the North were more suitable than others for agricultural pursuits. That the 1940s schemes warmed to large-scale collectivization reflected a matured appreciation for this reality. Colonial officials sought to implement their large-scale schemes in particular areas, the most infamous being the Gonja development scheme. In *Shaping Tradition*, Jeff Grischow explains the colonial logic behind the Gonja scheme, focusing particularly on the desire of colonial administrators to preserve an anthropological notion of African community alongside post-war necessities for development. The Gonja plan was choreographed so that communities from the border district of Zuarunguru would be transported down to Dagomba, in western Gonja. Dagomba had long occupied administrators’ minds as an area that because of the slave trade had been blocked from development. The desire to develop this area reflected broader colonial desires to develop Northern Ghana gradually and along African lines. It was thought the project would give greater food security to these former borderland communities, given Zuarungu district’s history of periodic famine and drought. As we shall see in Chapter Six, this approach to tackle Northern food security by bringing development ‘inland’ was shared by the Nkrumah government,

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484 Also, it failed to foster rapid and sustainable economic growth. Mixed farming and anti-tsetse campaigns were slow and did little to improve agricultural development. Grischow, 137.
as well. While the Gonja scheme may have focused more on collectivization and mechanized agriculture, the core drive to preserve community and block civil society prevailed; wage-labour would not be encouraged. Moreover, increased Anglo-French co-operation was believed to assist in the scheme’s development. Following a visit from the Governor of the Haute Volta, Monsieur Mouragues, in 1949 the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories outlined the extent to which he believed the fate of their respective border regions was intertwined. Speaking of the forthcoming French railway from Bobo Diulasso [sic] to Waga [sic] to be completed by 1951 he stated:

> If by then we have the Damongo groundnut scheme under weigh [sic] and if cattle are still being imported overland a the rate of 50,000 per year as at present, one likes to speculate on the possibility of at least seeing the construction of the Northern Territories railway – and junction with the French at Waga – become a reality.⁴⁸⁵

Unfortunately, not only did the Gonja scheme fail to live up to its expectations but the local development projects implemented during this period of late-colonial development proved flawed as well. In one 1950s memo regarding the use of local development funds, one Northern administrator lamented the failure of such local ‘self-help’ endeavors. The vision for small-scale projects was to not only to complement large-scale schemes, such as Gonja, but also to “stimulate the efforts of the people themselves.” However, as local funds were allocated and committees set to work on local projects, administrators soon learned that many committees had “departed from the principles of community development, which are based on self-help springing from below rather than the

⁴⁸⁵ *French Authorities and Anglo-French Co-op and Official Visits, 1949*, NAGT 8/38/1
imposition of projects from above. Clearly, Africans were not fooled by the colonial parlance of ‘self-help.’ ‘Springing from below’ was just another means for exploitation from above; the ends, if not the means, remained the same.

5.12 Conclusion

In preparing his annual report for 1948, the Commissioner of Labour in Accra inquired into the status of women and children in the Northern Territories, asking if families accompanied migrant workers, the extent to which they were employed, and if there were any provisions made for those “whose menfolk [were] in employment.” Responding a month later to the Labour Office, the Asst. D. C. of Bawku simply responded “N/A” – not applicable.

The Bawku administrator’s response was in keeping with colonial administrators’ tendency to discount inquiries into the status of women and children in the north-east. More importantly, it masks the extent to which women and children in the north-east factored into questions of labour and political-economy. Whether ‘taken’ as pawns or slaves to work as labourers on farms and plantations in Asante like Abnofo, Kibadu, and Atawa, or as ‘free labourers’ trafficked by “unscrupulous” men, or even as cross-border pawns, as many Busanga girls residing in Bawku seemed to have been, women and

486 Local Development Fund, NAGT 5/12/2

487 G. N Burden, Commissioner of Labour, Commissioner’s Labour Office, Accra, to Chief Commissioner of Tamale, January 1948, Kusasi Affairs, in [NAGT code not legible]

488 The question remains: how often did they accompany husbands and fathers? If seldom, then the response was “N/A”, meaning the question was flawed from the start. G. N Burden, Commissioner of Labour, Commissioner’s Labour Office, Accra, to Chief Commissioner of Tamale, January 1948, Kusasi Affairs, in [NAGT code not legible]
female children were very much a part of the ‘labour question’ in late-colonial northeastern Ghana.

I have discussed the *Kwaku Anin vs. C.O.P* file at length in this chapter not to point to the encroachment of civil society in 1940s Bawku. Rather I have sought to highlight how women were at times touchstones for important colonial debates regarding slavery and ‘free labour.’ In 1931, the year the girls were sold, pawning was a major concern of a questionnaire distributed to provide information for a report to the League of Nations. A decade later, the prosecution of Kwaku Anin was an attempt to demonstrate the seriousness with which Northern Territories administrators regarded pawning and other ‘vestiges of slavery.’ However, given the unevenness of development in the Northern Territories, the conditions on the ground in Bawku would suggest otherwise. Whether or not the girls were effectively ‘sold’ or pawned matters little in this context, except that penalties for pawning were different from slavery and pawns were in fact redeemable. As Klein and Roberts have explained, pawnship was an institution that “transferred labour from the poor to the rich as effectively as sale did.” As such, the Kwaku Anin case tells us both about colonial development and its failures in Northern Ghana as well as the status of women and children in West Africa.

These failed expectations of development to which Abnofo, Kibadu and Atawa fell victim did not stem from an abrupt change in development policy. Jeff Grischow has argued that in 1940s Northern Ghana the gradualism of indirect rule was replaced by development programs that were coordinated, implemented and surveilled by the colonial

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489 Klein and Roberts, 411.

490 Ibid, 422.
state. Certainly, this is true as the Gonja project did indeed reflect not only large-scale
development dreams of the Gold Coast, but also Haute Volta as well as the new post-war era of supposed regional co-operation. However, it seems that behind this sanitized mask of large-scale development, the residue of gradualism – at least regarding gendered, ‘undesirable’ customs – persisted. It persisted in the way colonial officials dealt with ‘vestiges of slavery’ such as pawning, which continued to persist in areas where wage-labour was blocked, such as the Northern Territories. It also existed in colonial attitudes toward female circumcision, a practice that could not be legislated away without obstructing cross-border mobility. Given Bawku’s reliance on labour from French territories, and given families’ reliance on pawning their children as a method of survival, action beyond ‘mass education’ was simply not possible. But, what cannot be prohibited can be stigmatized and by 1948, female circumcision was officially referred to as a ‘foreigner practice.’ That the colonial government chose to stigmatize borderland groups rather than compromise labour migration is not surprising. In areas of labour reserves, pathologizing rhetoric has long served as a means to distance the state from introducing legislative intervention that would compromise labour. As Maryinez Lyons notes of AIDS and Banyaruanda migrant labourers in Uganda, “the history of disease is replete with examples of blaming foreigners, often resident across the border of a neighboring country […] despite what was deemed dangerous to public health, the borders remained open to economic necessity.”

From this perspective, the rhetoric of ‘foreigners’ must not be seen merely as exclusionary but rather as a product of administrators’ desire to

keep labour moving, keep borders flexible, and keep ‘undesirable practices’ out of metropolitan minds and off of administrators’ desks.

As the Gold Coast marched toward independence, colonial frontiers were shaped to suit policy and not the other way around. As Paul Nugent and A.I. Asiwaju state, “there was a tension between new ideology of nationalism and the reality of borderlands where communities merged into each other despite boundaries.”492 As we shall see in Chapter Six, this colonial formula for development in Northern Ghana reinforced long-standing narratives of a backward North and set the stage for post-independence campaigns against supposed ‘undesirable’, ‘un-Ghanaian’ practices.

Chapter 6

‘Put some clothes on or Nkrumah will get you!’: Nudity as Undesirable in Nkrumah-era Northern Ghana, 1958-1966

During the first four decades of colonial rule, British administrators worked to implement an effective native administration in the Northern Territories. Central to this effort was preserving what they viewed as ‘tradition’ in the face of growing capitalist incursion. The Gonja scheme was one notable example of officials trying to head off disintegration of community. Similarly, large-scale development schemes of early post-colonial period were much like those preceding independence. In Ghana, the 1950s welfarism of Nkrumah shifted in 1961 from a focus on social welfare and services to a ‘big push’ toward state-led industrialization. In his study of disability programs in Nkrumah-era Ghana, Jeff Grischow noted how Nkrumah’s rehabilitation of disabled persons into productive workers drew on British ideas of social orthopaedics which stressed linkages between citizenship and work.493 Though the welfarist rhetoric of clothing and ‘undesirable practices’ framed post-independence development schemes as community-oriented, the intention of anti-nudity efforts was to off-set the negative social impacts of intended quick, industrial development and ever increasing urbanization; in other words, the objective was to facilitate the “smooth the transition from ‘traditional community’ to ‘modern community.’”494


494 Grischow, Shaping Tradition, 204
Campaigns against nudity in Northern Ghana were part of broader attempts by Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People’s Party (CPP) to expand state power in late 1950s. This began in 1958-9, when Nkrumah instituted the Preventative Detention Act which outlawed political opponents. The Act was swiftly followed by the CPP’s co-option of labour unions and producer associations as well as the banning of strikes. By 1959, unions were prohibited outright and the CPP took full control of the Farmer’s Council and women and youth organizations. What this meant was that all village-level organizations became mouthpieces of the CPP and women’s organizations were consolidated into one organization, the Ghana Women’s League (GWL). The consolidation of women’s organizations into the GWL worked to centralize women’s activities, bringing them more fully under the purview of the party and the state.

By 1960-61, this led to the re-organization of existing anti-nudity efforts. Nkrumah believed that unless something was done “at the official level” to co-ordinate the various efforts of the All-African Women’s League, White Fathers and other missions, “very little lasting results would be achieved.” This desire was supported by the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development’s social survey on nudity undertaken by the Sociology Department of the University College of Ghana in 1958. The survey explored the persistence of what the post-independence state called “socially undesirable practices” in Northern Ghana of which nudity was of greatest concern. The districts of Lawra, Wa area, Navrongo, Bolgatanga, and Yendi were covered by the survey and the following conclusions were drawn-up:

495 Kwame Nkrumah, The Prime Minister’s Office to Krobo Edusei, Esq., M.P., Minister of Transport and Communications, 5 October, 1959, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6
i) There are no parts of Ghana in which it is considered proper for adult men and women to appear in public completely naked, that is, without any covering of the genitals.

ii) The practice of nudity is prevalent among the following major tribal groups of the Northern and Upper Regions of the country: Frafra, Dagarti, Nankanni, Kokomba, Builsa, Kassena and Lobi.

iii) In many of the areas where nudity is practised, the people indulge in the use of LIP PLUGS, FACE AND BODY SCARIFICATION and in some cases FEMALE “CIRCUMCISION”, all of which practices are inconsistent with modern times and should be discouraged.

iv) The nudity problem in Ghana is primarily a female problem; and in all the areas studies, men wear enough clothing to satisfy the demands of decency

Until 1960, a prominent CPP women’s activist, Hannah Kudjoe, had led anti-nudity efforts and coordinated donations of used clothing from international and domestic donors for free distribution. As her efforts came more fully under the purview of the state, male party officials began to take issue with the methods she used to garner support and donations. For example, Kudjoe had employed publicity as a tool for creating awareness and increasing donations through photos and films of nude persons. The CPP responded, making it very clear to party officials in the North that the taking of photographs or films of nude people in the North to raise funds overseas was unacceptable:

... the Government regards the taking of photographs or films of nude or semi-nude people in this country for any purpose as being most undesirable, and I should be grateful if you would be good enough to assist in making this

496 Principal Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Accra, to The Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Upper Region, Bolgatanga, 3, September, 1960, “Memorandum on Nudity in the Northern and Upper Regions”, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6
known to all who may be concerned in your Mission or Department. 497

It was felt the publicity already provided to the Press had suggested “that the degree of nudity in this Region [the North] is greater than it is in fact.” 498 And the appearance through film and photos of widespread nudity in Ghana suggested the newly independent country was not fit for self-governance. As the Ministry of Social Welfare described in 1960:

The prevalence of unclothed persons in the Northern and Upper Regions and elsewhere in the country has often elicited ridicule and scorn from foreigners visiting this country. The practice itself tends to stigmatise the areas, where it predominates, as backward; and, because it is practiced mostly by women, it is quite easily associated with subordination of women, primitiveness and immorality. 499

The official policy of “no publicity” stemmed from associations between nakedness and primitive backwardness in colonial times. 500 As Philippa Levine has noted, images of nude Africans spurred Victorians’ obsession with primitive Africa. It was this obsession which facilitated scientists such as Francis Galton in southern Africa to measure African women’s bodies through the use of a sextant with those women unwilling to pose

497 Regional Office, Tamale. 26th May, 1959, Nudity Campaign, NAGT 5/2/8

498 E.S. Packham, Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Regional Office, Tamale to the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Prime Minister’s Office, Accra. 8th August 1959, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6

499 Principal Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Accra, to The Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Upper Region, Bolgatanga, 3, September, 1960, “Memorandum on Nudity in the Northern and Upper Regions”, NAGT 9/2/6


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portrayed as “unappreciative of the beneficent marvels of modern science.”\textsuperscript{501} Others, such as Sara Baartman - derogatively labelled “Hottentot Venus” - were trucked out for display throughout Europe as spectacle, furthering imperial perceptions of African women as hyper-sexualized.\textsuperscript{502} As Janice Boddy has shown, these perceptions of nudity and primitiveness worked together to justify colonial conquest. In Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, concerns about hygiene and specifically the practice of pharaonic circumcision worked to justify Victorians’ violent conquest.\textsuperscript{503} And in north-eastern Ghana during what Allman calls a “ritual disarming,” colonial officials replaced earth priests’ skins with native smocks and dressed chiefs in robes and red feze’s, thus accomplishing what guns could not—incorporating the Talensi into the colonial state.\textsuperscript{504} There was also a religious aspect of colonization via clothing when in north-western Ghana, the Catholic White Fathers, \textit{Les Pères Blanc}, made clothing a marker of Christian conversion.\textsuperscript{505}

Aside from linkages between nudity, primitiveness and conquest, nakedness suggested the subordination of women and spoke to anxieties about the status of women


\textsuperscript{505} Sean Hawkins, \textit{Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana}, 83.
and children prevalent throughout the colonial period. As my preceding Chapters have argued, male officials went to great lengths to manage undesirable practices of female circumcision and pawning in order to distance themselves from thorny questions about women’s status and slavery. Rather than work to abolish these practices through legislation, officials sought to manage them in the hope that they would naturally die-out as African societies evolved and developed over time. But with the coming of independence, these old concerns took on new meaning and the state focussed less on gradual, natural death and more on swiftly abolishing practices perceived to be backward and thus undesirable. Though labelled ‘anti-nudity,’ the campaign’s activities covered all practices considered by the state to be socially undesirable in Northern Ghana, including nudity, female circumcision, and scarification (tribal marks).

Nudity and scarification were considered particularly undesirable to the post-independence state as they not only indicated a perceived primitiveness, but also an outwardly visible tribal identity which could be placed above one’s civic, national identity. The belief that scarification still indicated tribal identity was curious, as this connection was dismissed by Rattray in 1930. In both volumes of *Tribes*, R.S. Rattray discussed tribal marks but did not go in depth for any one tribe except for the tribe of his informant, the Nankanse. The reason for this was that Rattray believed tribal marks had “aesthetic rather than a clan or tribal significance.”  

506 Like many other colonial officials, Rattray believed that the slave raids which swept across the Northern Territories in the nineteenth century had done much to upset notions of belonging as slave raiders such as Babatu would mark those under his affiliation with distinct marks. “Whatever may once

have been the value of tribal marks as a means of distinguishing tribes or clans, tattooing, with certain exceptions is now a somewhat uncertain criterion by which to judge such matters.”

Rattray’s findings worked to dismiss the earlier findings of Captain Cecil Armitage who in the 1920s conducted a study on tribal markings in the Northern Territories which focussed on the Gurensi, Talensi and Frafra tribal groups. Armitage examined marks on the cheeks of the face, nose, and around the eyes as well as the forehead, naval and torso and believed these marks denoted ethnicity, where one was from or former slave status.

Perhaps due to the access provided by his Nankanse informant, Victor Aboya, Rattray considered the Nankanse marks as ‘distinct’ and as such his tribe was an exception to this rule. For Rattray, the Nankanse were ‘tribal’ as exemplified through their distinct scarification and tattooing and this belief that some tribes had distinct tribal markings clearly carried over into independence. Speaking of tribal marks in her speeches, Kudjoe explained how ancestors used tribal marks when there were wars among tribes in order to distinguish tribal belonging. She emphasized that this was because back then, “they did not know that they belonged to one nation and as such, were one people”:

Now that we have had our Independence and are under one Leader, one Government and one Party, there are no more tribal wars and we do not expect them too [sic]. In order not to be tribalistic and thus bring about quarrels among

507 Ibid.

508 Exceptions were made in the anti-nudity legislation to exempt those performing tribal marks for medicinal reasons, but for the most part marks that were viewed as signifying ethnicity, autochthony, or a slave heritage were to be prohibited.
ourselves, we should discontinue with the practice of tribal marks on our faces and bodies.509

Placing tribal identity above the nation was judged as a hindrance to nation-building and
Kudjoe spoke to this nationalist sentiment when she noted Ghana as being ‘one’ nation
where all voted for Independence to “become one people.” “In this case the barrier which
the Imperialists created to divide the then Gold Coast in order to have the access of
cheating us has now been broken and burnt into ashes by our illustrious Leader Osagyefo
Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Founder of the Nation.”510 This was not just nationalist rhetoric. It
was indicative of Nkrumah’s brand of socialism – his plan of educating the people of
Northern Ghana to live “equally as their counterparts in the South” and transforming the
country into “a socialist state with plenty for all irrespective of class, tribe or creed.”511

The project of extinguishing demarcations based on class, tribe and creed
necessarily involved the constitution of a ‘national dress.’ However, what constituted
‘dress’ let alone ‘national dress’ was in question. Here, it is telling that in Tribes Rattray
discussed Nankanse tribal marks alongside ornaments including lip and ear piercing with
stalks of grass or animal bone as well as the adornment of brass anklets. Dress, on the
other hand, was described as “the wearing of leaves.’

Leaves are worn by women only, men go naked, or wear a
skin, or, on special occasions, a loin-cloth which is shaped

509 “Report of my recent tour to the Northern and Upper Regions on Anti-Nudity Operations from 16th-
27th June, 1964,” Nudity Campaign, NAGT 6/2/6

510 Ibid.

511 Ibid.
like a triangle. This is worn either hanging down or tucked into the string behind.512

To Rattray, the Nankanse were ‘clothed’ as leaves and other fibre or leather coverings constituted clothing and not merely ‘adornment’ as did bangles and piercings. Leaves constituted clothing so much so that he described seven different kinds of leaf coverings for women as well as substitutes called ‘aprons’ which were made from cotton-thread, fibre, grass, and leather.513 Jack and Esther Goody also made these distinctions when they pointed to LoDagaa indigenous conceptions of clothing and dress and adornments made of cloth coverings.514 For men, dress involved the wearing of a skin penis sheath and for women, waist beads for girls before reaching puberty after which time more decorative belts were worn, especially following marriage. Additionally, bracelets, necklaces and anklets were included among what the Goody’s considered pieces of clothing. What is important to note here is that though these examples were considered changeable forms of tribal dress, female circumcision and tribal marks constituted permanent alterations done to the body. In this way, many Northerners did indeed ‘clothe’ themselves, but not in the way Kudjoe and the CPP desired.

As in other post-independence African states, Ghana sought to identify and encourage a ‘national’ dress that would define what it meant to be a citizen of the new-nation state. For example, in post-independence Kenya Leslie W. Rabine’s informants noted the Minister of Culture and Social Services formed a committee of representatives

512 Rattray, Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland, Vol. II., 331-332.

513 Rattray, 332.

from different tribes to decide upon a national dress. Likewise in Zambia, Karen Tranberg Hansen noted that Zambia’s coat of arms which reads “One Zambia, one nation” does not feature any regional or “tribal” dress styles. However, in Ghana what constituted national dress was intimately related to the state’s perception of “Ghanaian culture” which, in turn, was dictated by the south:

As we are now one, our fashion, culture and the way of life must also be identical. It was not good for some of us to prefer going out naked for some reasons. If it was due to custom, we should realise that such a custom is out-moded; and if it was due to poverty, we should all try to work hard to earn our living [...] The practice is also not in conformity with Ghanaian culture.

6.1 Anti-nudity efforts – mass education

Nkrumah’s focus on welfarism in the 1950s meant anti-nudity activities were carried out along the same lines as late colonial-era social welfare projects. During the first phase of newly organized efforts in 1960, districts perceived to be affected most by nudity - Lawra, Wa, Zuarungu, Bawku, Navrongo and Sandema – became the focus of public mass rallies, addresses to the local councils, school classroom instruction on the


516 Karen Tranberg Hansen, Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Zambia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 78-79. Though Tranberg Hansen discusses the decision-making process about what the human bearers of the coat of arms would wear, she argues that “regional dress did not constitute a public issue”.

social and health aspects of clothing, and discussion groups at mass education classes. Mass education was of great importance in the early stages of the campaign and this education intensified through the Nkrumah period. As Kate Skinner noted of post-independence Ghana, mass education was rooted in late-colonial schemes of the same name and the push for mass education that was passed after CPP took power was modelled on Colonial Office blueprints thought to “serve as a force for social cohesion.” In this way, it was viewed as a salve to problems related to increased urbanization and unemployment as villagers’ lives could be bettered through education and improved sanitation and infrastructure. At a structural level, mass education was also about Africanizing the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development—mass education would be professionalized and hierarchically structured with the lowest rung on the ladder being filled by the Mass Education Assistant (MEA). These MEA’s were expected to have formal education up to Standard VII and were expressly expected to be able to speak and write in the language of the place they were to work. They were also to grow familiar with the social and cultural dimensions of their assignment. For these reasons, Skinner noted that many MEA’s in Asante Region were themselves from Asante. Similarly in Northern Ghana, emphasis was placed upon the field assistants who carried out mass education about nudity. Here also, familiarity was important in the

518 Principal Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Accra, to The Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Upper Region, Bolgatanga, 3, September, 1960, “Memorandum on Nudity in the Northern and Upper Regions”, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6

519 Kate Skinner, “‘It brought some kind of neatness to mankind’: mass literacy, community development and democracy in 1950s Asante,” *Africa* 79 no.04 (November 2009): 480.

520 Ibid.

521 Ibid., 481.
assignment of location. One application from a Field Assistant to the anti-nudity operations in the north-east, Francisca Adom, suggested that by 1964 age and marital status (unmarried), along with one’s birthplace were highly coveted attributes. Applicants had to state their tribe and Adom stated she was Builsa by birth. She also wrote that she spoke English, Buili, Hausa and Dagbani and that she completed her primary and middle school education in the Builsa District. She was unemployed and unmarried. Her age was twenty-one and she was already an active member of the voluntary Anti-Nudity group in 1963.  

Francisca Adom, c/o Builsa Local Council, Sandema, Upper Region to the Adm. Officer, Anti-Nudity Operation, Bolgatanga, 24 September, 1964. “Application for Employment as a Field Asst. in the Anti-Nudity Operation”, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NRG 9/2/6
Figure 7 - ‘Nudity Campaign’, Diagram Depicting Staff Organization of Anti-Nudity Operations c. 1964, in NAGT 6/2/6. Acronyms N.R. and U.R. represent Northern Region and Upper Region, respectively while F.A. denotes Field Assistants of which there are 10 listed. Note the placement of seamstresses at the bottom of the diagram.
At least on her application, Francisca Adom resembled the model candidate for Field Assistant. For those who were not as qualified, instructions were provided as to the conduct and character which was expected of all assistants.

Appendix “C” A Guide to Field Assistants on Anti-Nudity Campaign

1. A field Assistant is supposed, first and foremost to have love and sympathy for other persons – especially so when the people she is dealing with appear to be somewhat ignorant

2. The Field Assistant’s work lies in the Field – she must be prepared to travel outside her normal place of residence in order to carry the campaign to the remotest parts of her area of operation

3. Whenever possible and practicable, a Field Assistant should give demonstrations depicting the various aspects of the campaign, for example bathing of children showing the nudes the correct way of putting on clothings, etc.

4. A Field Assistant should study carefully the psychology (and history) of the people among whom she is working and apply this approach to win their confidence. She should also have the respect for both young and old, this will win their affection.

5. Wherever possible the Field Assistant should seek the co-operation and good-will of the local chief, the local authority and party officials if any, teachers etc. This will greatly contribute to the efficient performance of her duties.

6. A Field Assistant should have the greatest sense of integrity and honesty

7. A Field Assistant should never be discriminatory in the discharge of her duties especially in the distribution of any items of clothing that may be under her charge. The basis of distribution should be “The most needy first”

8. Daily and monthly reports must be efficiently made

9. A Field Assistant should not indulge in any immoral practices, as these will lower her prestige among the community she is working. Her personal comportment must be exemplary.

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10. A Field Assistant should be well conversant with the definition of Nudity which reads as follows: -

N – Never allow people (young and old) to go about naked. It is indecent.
U – Urge and encourage mothers to clothe themselves.
D – Defy beliefs in relation to nudity.
I – Instruct and give simple needle-work lessons to the public.
T – Teach and educate the public about clothing.
Y – Young people imitate or copy adults. Set a good example to them.

While the field assistant’s moral character was of foremost importance so was her discipline. The reference to ‘immoral practices’ directly speaks to the reason why mass education was expanded in the first place – as a response to increased urbanization and its negative social implications. Moreover, instructions to study the ‘psychology’ and history of those with whom she worked in order to win the affection of both young, old, chief, and local authority were similar to the methods of early colonial anthropologists. Overall, the instructions give the sense of mass education field assistants’ strengthened earlier colonial associations between clothing and alterity – otherness. In this way, activities carried out by the post-colonial field assistants were similar to those of their colonial counterparts who focussed on teaching gendered domestic rituals related to hygiene and sanitation.

Demonstrations of the proper bathing of children and wearing of clothing were a large focus of a field assistant’s work. As one monthly return filed by an assistant working in the districts of Bolgatanga, Bawku and Wa in the Upper Region in 1964 reported, topics covered included nudity, “female incision”, tribal marks and child care. The dangers of female circumcision (termed here as female incision) were a focus as was
how to bathe a child properly. These demonstrations were followed by clothing supplied to needy nudes. This focus on bathing, hygiene and sanitation as a way to combat undesirable practices resembled Victorians’ obsession with soap and cleanliness as a reflection of bourgeois values. Though Nkrumah’s Ghana was outwardly socialist, the work of nation-building nevertheless involved the rhetoric of individual civic responsibility which placed bathing “at the center of domestic moral economies.” As Deborah Durham noted of bathing in Botswana, “Who bathes, who doesn’t, when baths are taken and how are bound up with expectations of civic personhood and political context of liberal democracy.” Baths were about civic responsibility and reflected a commitment to “self-improvement through hard work.” Though Durham highlights the individual nature of bathing—baths taken by individuals as opposed to other more communal rites of passage -- in Northern Ghana anti-nudity campaigns framed hygiene and sanitation as both an individual and communal endeavor. Field Assistants taught groups of women, often in public spaces such as markets, how to bath their children. These demonstrations were certainly about ‘self-improvement through hard work’ but self-improvement of the individual within and not apart from the group. This is best


527 Ibid.

528 Ibid., 206.
exemplified in the communal building of bathhouses which took place a year before the coup that overthrew Nkrumah. In March 1965 the Social Advancement Unit of the Ministry of Social Welfare issued a memo on the Building of Public Bathrooms and Stores for the Unit.\footnote{The National Committee for Social Advancement was proposed by Nkrumah and approved in 1964 but had not functioned since the fall of that year. It was reported that the functions of the Committee were not at all clear or definitive and that a new national committee was needed to sit on the advisory board to the Social Advancement Unit.} The memo explained that the building of public bathrooms by Local Councils was meant to serve as an incentive for people to cultivate “the habit of bathing regularly.”\footnote{Kate F. Aboagye-Madam, for Director Social Advancement to the Regional Commissioner, Northern and Upper Regions and all District Commissioners, Northern and Upper Regions, March 27th, 1965, “Social Advancement Unit – Building of Public Bathrooms & Stores for the Unit”, \textit{Anti-Nudity Campaign}, NAGT 5/2/8} What was most important to this endeavor was not that the bathhouses were being built at all but rather the manner in which they were built; they were to be completed through Communal Labour and as the Unit explained, the people had ‘volunteered’ to enter into communal labour for their completion. Perhaps more than any other endeavor, the communal building of bathhouses demonstrated the balance between individual self-improvement and Nkrumahist collectivism.

The ‘self-help’ logic of sanitation extended to Field Assistants’ encouragement of needle-work and sewing among women. As the above Figure 7 shows, though occupying the lowest level of the anti-nudity efforts seamstresses were nevertheless an important part of the campaign. The campaign’s focus on sewing began after the re-organization of efforts in 1959 when the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development in Tamale set about reorganizing the distribution of existing clothing with a view to encourage sewing. At the start, the Department controlled clothing centrally with most of
it being set aside for cases of flood, fire and other emergencies. However, small quantities and especially the used clothing obtained from the Catholic Mission were set aside for “self-help sewing materials.” The encouragement of needle-work and sewing was a natural extension of the colonial government’s minimalist efforts toward female vocational education in the North. Dress-making had been common in coastal West Africa as early as the 1930s where elite fetishization of wax-prints in Lomé, Togo, reflected increased consumption patterns. There, the import of sewing machines facilitated the development of dressmaking in the 30s and 40s and tailored outfits came into demand. In Northern Ghana however the encouragement of sewing and building of bathhouses through communal labour was not just about improving sanitation and hygiene of the individual and community. Rather, the programs sought also to encourage people’s self-improvement through work and specifically wage-earning. For example, the encouragement of sewing through the establishment of sewing workshops went hand in hand with the establishment of child care centres and day nurseries in the North. Day nurseries provided women with free childcare so they could enter the waged workforce as seamstresses. This was common throughout post-independence Africa as sewing was seen as an ideal way to turn women into wage-earners. As Kathleen Sheldon wrote of the sewing industry in post-independence Mozambique, few seamstresses could be found in

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531 Miss J. Gordon, Principal Community Development Officer, Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, Tamale to the Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Regional Commissioner’s Office, Tamale, 9 October, 1959, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, in NAGT 9/2/6

colonial times but shortly after independence was achieved in 1975 Frelimo nationalized factories and espoused an “orthodox Marxist approach to women’s emancipation” that “emphasized integrating women into the waged labour force.”

Since child care centres had not existed in colonial Mozambique children were often left on their own or under the supervision of neighbors or relatives. Subsequently, Frelimo set out a state policy of developing child care centres in women’s workplaces along with many other measures to assist working women following the birth of their children. In this way, the day nurseries provided women the freedom to enter the workforce but also served to quell officials’ fears about absentee parenting resulting from breakdown of family network and youth migration to the cities. In Ghana, these concerns were first raised by sociologist and opposition politician K. Busia in his 1950 Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi – Takoradi. Thus, the establishment of Day Nurseries served to ensure that the children of women working in the formal economy received the right education before attending school. Kudjoe claimed these efforts of the Ghana Women’s League were “non-political” in nature, stating that the League was simply a “women’s social organisation fighting for the rights and security of their children.” But the party’s role in educating young children was of course political. In Kudjoe’s words, day nurseries were about the

\text{534 Ibid., 32.} \\
\text{535 K. A. Busia, Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi (London, 1950).} \\
\text{536 Ghana Women’s League, National Secretariat, Accra to Bawku, Kusasi District, 14th March, 1960.} \\
\text{‘Country-Wide Tour,” Anti-Nudity Campaign, in NAGT 5/2/8} \]
proper care and training of “children who are the Nation’s torch bearers when we are no more.”

Kudjoe’s focus on children formed a major part of her efforts in Bawku. There, Kudjoe reported that “nudity was common with children rather than adults in this town.”

Kudjoe’s concern for children’s nakedness is curious given indigenous perceptions of clothing and age-relations. In Tribes, Rattray had noted that among the Nankanse, “young boys and girls go about quite naked and the latter, even after reaching puberty, often do not trouble very much about ‘clothes’, and walk about quite nude without a vestige of self-consciousness.” Similarly, Misty L. Bastian wrote that among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, indigenous conceptions of dress were such that for children undress was strongly associated with playtime and intimacy at home and evading clothing restrictions was about a perceived intimacy of environment.

However, by the 1960s Kudjoe warned that it was dangerous to let children go about naked and explained the dangers connected with it. She urged mothers to take great care of their children. Conversely, the apparent nakedness of Nankanse youth was described by Rattray as normal, even after puberty, and there was no social stigma attached to this nudity. Similarly, among the Igbo youth of Nigeria, Bastian noted ‘social nakedness’ was perceived as a “public, communal act – displaying the body in order to demonstrate a

537 “Report of my recent tour to the Northern and Upper Regions on Anti-Nudity Operations from 16th-27th June, 1964,” Nudity Campaign, NAGT 6/2/6

538 Ibid.

539 Rattray, Tribes, 332.

desire to join with others.” These communal acts of social nakedness were grounded in age-relations. A child or uninitiated youth could be “in a state of undress in a public space because he is still very much in process and his nakedness is a sign of liminality of his being.” Here, nakedness or states of undress among youth denoted an active process of becoming; a transition from youth to adult. As discussed in earlier chapters, transitions from child to adult were marked by rites of passage including initiation as well as marriage, both of which were controlled by elders. With the introduction of wage-labour in colonial times, male migrants from the North returned from the south with cash which allowed them the means to increasingly dictate their own marriage arrangements and thus entry into adulthood. Reasserting elder’s control of these transformations became important to colonial administrators who sought to control youth and thus prevent unrest. Such measures were deeply embedded in colonial perceptions of patriarchy and ‘tradition’ within indirect rule. Similarly, post-independence anti-nudity efforts focussed on clothing children and youth were very much about controlling this transition from youth to adult; from playful, un-captured social nakedness to clothed citizen loyal to the CPP.

The CPP’s focus on hygiene, sanitation, and domesticity came together with the party’s mandate to increase wage-earning, consumption and party loyalty among Northern youth. For example, the building of public bathhouses through communal labour was about getting unemployed men to work. In addition to the bathrooms, stores were built in Regional and District Centres where clothes received by the Unit would be

541 Ibid., 39
stored and “sold to the people at a very low cost.” This was about encouraging consumerist logic so people could “cultivate the habit of buying their own articles of clothing, and thus will not always look forward to receiving free supply of clothing from the Government.” The transition from free distribution of clothing to individual consumption was not just about self-help and improvement. In order to further this sort of consumerist logic Northern Ghanaians needed more money and more purchasing power in order to buy clothes. In a letter to the Agricultural Department in 1959 the Regional Commissioner’s Office in Tamale warned that the practice of nudity was confined to “areas bordering the frontiers, where there is little or no possibility of extending cultivable areas to feed an increasing population.” However, the Commissioner believed the most “effective means of eradicating the practice is to increase the agricultural production and thereby purchasing power.” Nkrumah was fully on board with this and assured Tamale that the Government would take every effort to “assist people in the area concerned to increase their wage-earning capacity and consequently their purchasing power.” To this end, Nkrumah made enquiries to the Agricultural Office as to the most “effective methods of intensifying efforts in the areas concerned to increase

542 Kate F. Aboagye-Madam, for Director Social Advancement to the Regional Commissioner, Northern and Upper Regions and all District Commissioners, Northern and Upper Regions, March 27th, 1965, “Social Advancement Unit – Building of Public Bathrooms & Stores for the Unit”, Anti-Nudity Campaign, in NAGT 5/2/8

543 Ibid.

production, for example, by increased use of fertilizers and a more adequate supply of water for both human and livestock consumption.”

6.2 Anti-Nudity, Builders Brigades and ‘uplifting’ Northern youth

Nkrumah re-organized anti-nudity efforts because he desired to increase the earning capacity of people and a central component of this plan was the expansion of Builders Brigades in the North. “In this way it is hoped that with more money in their hands poverty, which is one of the main reasons for this form of backwardness, will be removed and people then may be more readily lend themselves to the advice of the advantages of clothing oneself.” Writing to the Minister of Transport and Communication, Nkrumah requested the Ministry’s Builders Brigade Board to facilitate the building of four Builders Brigade camps to be established in areas where nudity was prevalent “in addition to two existing camps.” Here, one of the existing camps Nkrumah referred to was the Damongo camp in the Northern Region. In his fascinating study of the Builder’s Brigades in Nkrumah-era Ghana, Jeffrey Ahlman explained the structure of the Damongo camp as having a “pay scale ranging from three to four shillings a day, while some artisans collected an additional tool allowance for the purchase and maintenance of equipment […] Damongo Brigaders also received free food, housing, and uniforms.” Indeed, Brigaders were provided such access to cheap clothing and goods that in

545 E.S. Packham, Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Tamale, to the Principal Agricultural Officer, Division of Agriculture, Tamale, 3 October, 1959, Nudity in Northern Ghana, NAGT 9/2/6

546 Kwame Nkrumah, The Prime Minister’s Office to Krobo Edusei, Esq., M.P., Minister of Transport and Communications, 5 October, 1959, Ibid.

discussing camp structure, Ahlman’s interviewees insisted that the Brigades had made food and other goods so cheap that the goods including food, baskets, shoes, and tailored cloth, were remembered as “being almost free.”

The provision of cheap goods in the camps speaks to the origins of the Builders Brigades. Originally, the Brigades were created as a way to employ otherwise unemployed male and females between the ages of 15 and 45. Brigaders were trained in agricultural practices, road and housing construction, sewing and other crafts and at the Damongo camp and others, the Brigades undertook “agricultural pursuits like farming and animal husbandry” all of which Nkrumah thought would be a “good beginning” to efforts in the North. However, the Regional Commissioner in Tamale did not share Nkrumah’s vision for increased camps. Rather, he favoured an intensification of self-help endeavors, arguing that Northern people needed help to help themselves. Unwilling to forfeit the opportunity to expand the Brigades’ reach in the North, Nkrumah suggested to the Regional Commissioner of the Northern Region, L.R. Abavana, that there should be a merging of their two ideas: Nkrumah would get the two extra Builders Brigades but the Brigades would undertake the agricultural pursuits the Regional Office requested, including dam or pond digging as well as agricultural and livestock development. As Nkrumah himself explained, the development schemes could be “profitably participated in by Brigaders” who would in the process be “increasing their purchasing power by the earning of wages and at the same time they and their fellow-farmers who are not

\[548\] Ibid., 96.

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Brigaders will be working on projects aimed at improving generally on their own knowledge of agriculture.\textsuperscript{549}

Nkrumah insisted on expanding Builders Brigade camps to combat nudity in the North because he believed they helped to stem the negative repercussions of rapid urbanization and unemployment.\textsuperscript{550} Increasingly, youth went to the cities for employment only to find themselves in semi-skilled jobs. Male unemployment thus became an important issue post-independence and the forming of Builders Brigades sought to capture these unemployed youth and make them into a new productive and modern citizenry. Their popularity was reflected in the fact there were 25,000 Brigaders by the time of the coup in 1966.\textsuperscript{551} At the core of the scheme was to “return the country’s young men and women to the land through a network of mechanized work camps and state farms.”\textsuperscript{552} This aim seemed to fit with Nkrumah’s desire to increase wage-earning, consumption and desire for clothing. Most importantly, Nkrumah favoured the Brigades over self-help because the camps gave youth access to money and alternative paths of upward mobility and respectability. The uplifting of youth was central to CPP politics and young people made up a significant part of the party’s power base. As Ahlman noted, the Brigades opened-up debates about gender and age-relations and the role of Ghanaian youth in post-independence Ghana.

\textsuperscript{549} Kwame Nkrumah, Prime Minister’s Office to L.R. Abavana, Regional Commissioner, Northern Region, Tamale, 7 November, 1959, “Nudity in Northern Ghana,” NAGT 9/2/6


\textsuperscript{551} Ahlman, 88.

\textsuperscript{552} Ibid., 87
The Regional Commissioner’s hesitation toward expanding the Brigades in the North was tied to the opportunities the Brigades provided for youth to challenge the age and gender relations imbued in chieftaincy structures. Much of Nkrumah’s appeal among youth was a result of his desire to scrap these structures. As Emmanuel Akyeampong noted, the CPP’s formation in 1949 and subsequent victory marked a significant point in “long-standing struggles” between young men and women and chiefly authorities.  

This was at its base a commoner’s party and the prospect of breaking down chieftaincy structures meant a greater role for the common man in shaping the nation’s political future. Importantly, the CPP also represented the potential for reversing “the decline in their socioeconomic conditions caused by the intensification of indirect rule and the enhanced dominance of expatriate firms in commerce.”  

This was a foremost aim for Nkrumah because as Richard Rathbone noted, if chiefly authority was not checked and undermined, the economic transformation and modernization of Ghana would remain in jeopardy.  

In Northern Ghana where indirect rule was particularly entrenched, these attempts were especially unwelcome and throughout the early development of nationalist politics many Northerners, formerly of the Northern People’s Party (NPP), aligned themselves with the larger, Asante-based National Liberation Movement (NLM) as a strategy for blocking the CPP’s rise. With the CPP’s eventual victory and subsequent


554 Ibid.

blocking of opposition parties in 1958 the path toward uplifting Ghana’s youth at the expense of the chiefs seemed inevitable.

The inclusion of Builders Brigades in anti-nudity efforts was not only about decreasing unemployment and increasing wage-earning and consumption of clothing. Nor was it only about uplifting the ‘common man.’ Builders Brigades, like the employment of Field Assistants for Mass Education, were about disciplining youth. The camps worked to teach discipline and critics of the camps went so far as to label them fascist, comparing them to fascist youth groups in southern and Eastern Europe. With this emphasis on discipline, it is not surprising that the Brigades also functioned as tools for party intimidation. The perceived militarization of Brigaders was best exemplified through their uniforms as Brigaders were “dressed in khaki-colored shorts, trousers, and (for women) skirts coupled with a field hat and scarf.” Moreover, their public performances included drills, parades and displays of regimental discipline. Ahlman noted that Ghanaians reacted to this “systematized display of state power by creating stories about the young organization and its members which bemoaned an apparent arming of the youth.” As Philippa Levine noted of Victorian Britain, clothing was closely related to discipline as “nakedness figured a chaotic range of sin, immorality, desire and resistance.” In this sense, the clothing of the Brigaders was about discipline and, by extension, party control. Bringing more Northerners into the Brigade camps and

556 Ahlman, 88.
557 Ibid., 99.
558 Ibid.
outfitting them in uniforms worked to not only create disciplined wage-earners, but also men and women who rather than resist would be loyal to the CPP.

6.3 Anti-nudity as Disciplining ‘Problem Tribes’

Resistance to CPP rule remained a concern throughout the 1960s and it is not surprising that if anti-nudity was about disciplining youth it was also about disciplining so-called ‘problem tribes.’ As the 1958 social survey noted, nudity prevailed among the following major tribal groups of the Northern and Upper Regions of the country: Frafra, Dagarti, Nankanni, Kokomba, Builsa, Kassena and Lobi. Particularly in the north-west, anti-nudity meetings were targeted at disciplining the Lobi. According to Kudjoe,

> Most of the nudes (the lobis) immigrate [sic] from the Upper Volta to the Northern part of Ghana for the purpose of peasant farming. These people with peculiar way of life, are very difficult to deal with. Steps should therefore be taken to ban the entry of these nude people to the country.  

Of course, “who is naked and who is nude (to use the Western distinction), or even who is clothed, depends on who is looking.” In this case, it was the state ‘who’ was looking and the notable continuance of some to go nude after the first phases of the campaign indicated the persistence of primitiveness, and more importantly, functioned as an outward marker of ‘resistance.’ For example, while it was believed poverty was the cause of nudity in other areas of the North, among the Lobi it was thought custom and tradition perpetuated the practice. One report from a meeting in the north-west explained that those

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561 Bastian, 35.
Lobi who came to the meeting were not destitute. Rather they by and large were “fairly well-to-do people, producing large quantities of foodstuffs.” As such, the persistence of nudity, lip perforation and the removal of the clitoris had to be due to outdated custom and tradition:

We have told them that the good customs and traditions will be preserved and improved upon, but the bad ones will have to be thrown over boards. We have told them the intention of the government to rid this country of these and other undesirable practices quickly and voluntarily. If voluntary action fails, then there will be compulsion by legislation.\textsuperscript{562}

This carrot-and-stick method of dealing with non-co-operative tribes dates back to the hey-day of indirect rule in the 1930s. As discussed in Chapter Four, a similar threat was issued by DC J.K. Syme to the Bawkunaba regarding the abandonment of female circumcision. Here, those tribes such as Lobi who were earlier taxonomized by colonial rulers as difficult rabble-rousers were similarly re-constituted through anti-nudity efforts in the post-independence period. However, unlike the 1930s where officials actively avoided discussions of legislation, in post-independence Ghana direct state action through legislation was a legitimate threat.

6.4 Disciplining women: by-laws and Local Authorities

The institution of local by-laws represented the third phase of anti-nudity efforts aimed at those who refused to abandon undesirable practices. The by-laws functioned as a tool for local discipline and a central component of Nkrumah’s chieftaincy reforms was the switching of authority from the colonial appointed Chiefs and headmen to elected

\textsuperscript{562} \textit{Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6}
Local Authorities. As such rather than enforcing the by-laws through Chiefs the CPP looked to elected Local Authorities. Despite this shift, the Regional Commissioner especially welcomed the proposed by-laws enacted by Local Authorities because he preferred the local court system run by indigenous authorities:

Court action arising out of offences against these bye-laws [sic] would be cognisable by Local Courts. The merit in this course would be that since Local Courts have been established in each Local Authority area, presided over by indigenes, the mere fact of an indigenous person dispensing justice in these matters, particularly where the practice is founded in custom, will inevitably have a salutary effect on offenders and also produce an effective propaganda value.563

The Regional Commissioner’s preference for local by-laws enforced by Local Authorities had less to do with the divestment of Chiefs than with the affirmation that the Local Courts would be run by indigenous authorities. Once implemented, these indigenous local authorities could use the by-laws to discipline nudes in public places, including markets, religious services, mass education classes and other public spaces. Most important would be that these by-laws would also cover scarification of the face and body and female “circumcision” and coincide with the campaign’s intensification of mass education efforts.

In reality, Local Authorities were little different from colonial-era Chiefs in the sense that they shared the aim of controlling women. Nudity was viewed by the 1958 Survey and the CPP as a female problem and the by-laws primarily functioned as a tool for disciplining women. As a result, public spaces frequented by women were especially

563 Secretary to the Regional Commissioner to the Principal Secretary of Social Welfare, Accra, 4 November, 1960, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6
open to b-law enforcement and markets became controlled spaces. In Kusasi District, markets along the Ghana-Togo, Ghana-Upper Volta boundaries were targeted with Kudjoe acquiring a list of frontier markets from the Bawku Government Agent which included Sapelliga, Mogonori, Kulugungu, Pusiga, Widana and Wirinyanga markets.\(^564\)

As early as 1961, Kudjoe reported gains in the north-east, stating “the majority of market women who went to market with only a single leaf [sic] on the waist, now wear clothes to attend market days, funerals, including other functions. They are realizing that wearing clothes is very essential to the body as air is to human life.”\(^565\) However, these apparent gains in the north-east were probably exaggerated. Unlike Dagomba, where the Department of Community Development and Social Welfare had a strong base, in Bawku my informants related that while they knew of the Department at the time, they were not aware of its activities.\(^566\) Moreover, any gains that were made were not all voluntary, but performed under the threat of government action as people were widely warned of the repercussions of transgressing the by-laws put in place, “who-ever [sic] practices nakedness anywhere in this Country will be sent to appear before the Local Court.”\(^567\) The aim of targeting women in their place of work was strategic and very much about

\(^{564}\) Government Agent, E.D. Mahami, Bawku to Mrs. Hannah Cudjoe, Organising Secretary, c/o Regional Office, Tamale, 6 June 1959, \textit{Nudity Campaign}, NAGT 5/2/8

\(^{565}\) \textit{Nudity Campaign, Bawku}, NAGT 5/2/8. Kudjoe’s work in Bawku is very interesting since when Representatives first met in 1959 to discuss the issue, it was openly admitted that it would be very difficult to make progress in the north-east. The majority of Kudjoe’s Mass Education Assistants were stationed in East and West Dagomba and it was felt their efforts would only really take hold in Bolgatanga, Navrongo, Sandema, Wa and Lawra. Certainly, in 1959 it seemed that Bolgatanga was the farthest ‘east’ campaigners felt they could reach.

\(^{566}\) Group Interview, 30 October 2010, Bawku Township, Bawku, Upper East Region, Ghana.

\(^{567}\) “Nudity Campaign, Senegaba, Kugri & Garu, 1961,” \textit{Anti-Nudity Campaign}, NAGT 5/2/8
discipline in the new nation state. As Bastian points out for contemporary Nigeria, barring signs of ‘madness’, the act of stripping of oneself in the market indicated the individual’s removal of the “garment of civil behavior,” effectively placing his or herself outside of the “tightly woven web of Igbo social relations.” Further, he would be seen as “the ultimate, undisciplined individual: a being who has refused to be part of society and is an affront to shared understanding of how personhood is communally constructed.” 568

In other words, clothing in the marketplace was and still is tied to discipline and communal understanding of personhood.

Women’s undress had much to do with how bodies are “surveilled by others, but not always and necessarily with masculine surveillance over feminine forms and practices.” 569 But in the case of anti-nudity efforts in Northern Ghana, male surveillance was considered integral to the campaign’s success. In 1959, the state admitted that generally speaking it was “not geared to deal with women at all” and thus rationalized that it could “do very much more with men.” 570 Men were recruited to govern women’s continued state of undress as they were looked upon as the driving force to persuade women to abandon it. For example, an anti-nudity meeting held on 29th August, 1964 stressed their role. “The role of men in this scheme is of vital importance since they are the husband’s [sic] whose wives fall victim in this social evil of nudity. Thus, their

568 Bastian, 37.
569 Ibid., 35.
570 “Main Points Arising from Discussion with Representatives of the Religious Missions, All African Women League, the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, the Ministry of Health and the Chairmen of Local Councils held at the Regional Assembly Hall”, Tamale, 4 March, 1959, Nudity, Tribal Markings, etc., NAGT 8/2/152
education about the eradication of nudity cannot be over-emphasized. Men should therefore be brought into the picture towards the crusade against nudity.”

Even Kudjoe declared the importance of men especially male elders in disciplining women stating the people had “great faith in their traditional rulers and anything that their rulers would accept was for them all.” Consequently, the presence of male leaders such as District Commissioners and Chiefs was seen as particularly important. Much like in the colonial period, in the north-east, the DC and Chiefs both promised at rallies to “persuade their people to follow up at Pusiga, Zebilla, and Kulungugu.” Meetings also targeted women and appealed to men to control women. The record of one meeting targeting Lobi in the towns of Bole and Mandare in the north-west in January of 1961 reported that public opinion was falling on the side of the campaign since now “the Lobi women find themselves the object of other people’s gaze and remarks.” To be clear, ‘other people’s gaze’ meant male gaze and the report mentioned that the men had “been active in exhorting their women to clothe themselves.” In response, the women assembled at the meeting resisted their stigmatization at their hands of men and accused the men of “not providing them with clothes or money with which to buy the clothes.”

The men refused to accept this responsibility and asked the women what they had done with the free gifts of clothes.

571 “First District Anti-Nudity Committee Meeting Held on 29th August, 1964,” Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6


573 “Monthly Returns for August 1964 Upper Region”, September 31, 1964, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6

574 Ibid.
supplied them some time ago. There was complete silence, but later some of the men said they were prepared to dig them out of the women’s belongings in the compounds!\(^{575}\)

Though Kudjoe observed that many men found it hard to provide for the maintenance of their families, especially the provision of clothing for wives and children, she could only offer advice along party lines. She urged the men to “engage in co-operative farming” which would assist them to “earn more money which would eventually help them raise their living standards.”\(^{576}\)

In addition to the male surveillance and discipline of nudes in marketplaces, the songs and speeches aimed at mobilizing women were organized along male, paternalist lines. An example of a Programme of activities for Bawku, dated July 13, 1965 reads:

1. A Speech by – District Commissioner
2. Introductory address by – Miss. M. Kanton
3. Talk by Miss B. Obeng
4. A song by Bawku Women’s Group
5. Talk by Mr. M.A. Larkai
6. A short speech by Bawku Magazis
7. Vote of thanks by – Mr. A.A. Onwona\(^{577}\)

These songs of the rallies were sung not only in Bawku but in Bongo and other areas of the north-east and as Kudjoe described were “Party songs of praises to Osagyefo Dr.

\(^{575}\) Ibid.


Kwame Nkrumah, the party and the Government.” As Susan Geiger and Elizabeth Schmidt noted in their studies, the use of songs in rallies and particularly within women’s wings was a common way to mobilize the masses. However, while the talks and songs by women for women were included in the Bawku programme the start and conclusion of this mobilization was led by men, revealing the paternalist framing of even these women’s rallies. Moreover the irony was that while Magazis – indigenous women leaders – were included in the rallies, one of my male informants argued that magazis in the north-east were either not as powerful as mythologized or their power was reduced during colonial times. With men considered the primary drivers of the campaigns the disciplining of women was inevitable. “All of the women” the Regional Commissioner proclaimed,” must be clothed whether they are in their compounds, villages, on the farm, on the roads, in market places and in fact, everywhere they go.”

6.5 ‘Full-out’ Legislation – a last resort

Though local by-laws were the preferred method of discipline, more comprehensive legislation was approved by Cabinet. Though it was intended to only be implemented in the final stage of the anti-nudity campaign, proposed legislation was drawn-up early on in 1960 as part of Nkrumah’s re-organization. This ‘full-out’


579 Of course, the former explanation may have resulted from the Chief’s interest in affirming the power of his own chiefly lineage, both those that came before him and those to come.

580 “Speech by the Regional Commissioner of the Northern Region at rallies at Bawla and Tuna against Nudity and Other Undesirable Practices, 1 February 1961,” in NAGT 8/2/152:
legislation would make nudity an offence and target any person “wilfully and indecently exposing himself or herself in any public place.”

Appendix I: Suggestions for drafting instructions on legislation affecting persons who wilfully and indecently expose themselves in public and who indulge in certain practices

It is very much appreciated that legislations, which are intended to abolish a social institution which is deeply rooted in custom and tradition are always difficult to enforce, unless public feeling in the areas particularly affected is in favour. It is therefore the primary intention that the various measures of social action indicated in the main Memorandum should first be given a chance of creating the necessary social conscience before the legislation takes effect.

This legislation should be simple and may take the form of an amendment, by enlargement, of the existing provision in sub-section (33) of Section 142 of the Criminal Code, in order,

1) To define “indecent exposure” as including insufficient or inadequate cover for the genitals, waist and the breasts; and,

2) Possibly, to have graduated penalty, from 10/- for the first offence, to 205 for repeated and subsequent offences.

NOTE: Section 142, Sub-section (33) of the Criminal Code reads as follows: Whoever does any of the following acts shall be liable to a fine of forty shillings, namely – “Wilfully and indecently expose his person to any public place or in view shared, or expose his person in any place with intent to insult any female…….”

581 Principal Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Accra, to The Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Upper Region, Bolgatanga, 3, September, 1960, “Memorandum on Nudity in the Northern and Upper Regions,” Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, in NAGT 9/2/6

582 Principal Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Accra, to The Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Upper Region, Bolgatanga, 3, September, 1960, “Memorandum on Nudity in the Northern and Upper Regions. Appendix I: Suggestions for drafting instructions on legislation affecting persons who wilfully and indecently expose themselves in public and who indulge in certain practices”, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6
3) Female “Circumcision” should be made an offence and it should also be made an offence for any person, whether a parent or relative, to permit the scarification of the face or any part of the body of a child or young person under the age of 17, unless such an operation is deemed necessary on health grounds and is only performed by a registered medical practitioner.

This legislation would only be enforced once the first three measures were well underway as it was believed that persuasion was still the best method for convincing people to abandon nudity and other undesirable practices. Even in 1964-65, the Social Advancement Unit still believed in ‘persuasion.’

We still believe that the best way to deal with a problem of this nature is not by force or legislation and that the free distribution of articles of clothing should continue for the time being […] we are confident that when our proposals for selling the articles of clothings to the nudes at token prices at the later stages of the campaign are introduced, the people will not hesitate to purchase the clothings when such a scheme is gradually pursued.583

More than anything, conduct needed to be modelled by local authorities and it was believed by watch-dog groups made up of local committee members that success depended upon their setting of an example. “It is advisable to go by the literal road rather than the coercive one. The coercive one may work but one cannot tell what is at the back of the minds of the people.”584

6.6 Conclusion

Nkrumah-era anti-nudity activities were unique because although they appeared welfarist the overall campaign was “more of a political nature than ordinary Government


584 ‘First District Anti-Nudity Committee Meeting Held on 29th August, 1964,” Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6
Departmental activity.” The political nature of anti-nudity campaign became apparent when Nkrumah re-organized existing efforts to bring the campaign under state control in 1960. When Kudjoe first began her activities, she focussed on taking photos and films of nudes to encourage overseas donations of second-hand clothes for distribution. These methods brought unwelcome publicity. But despite the policy of ‘no publicity,’ international interest and donations of clothing continued right up to Nkrumah’s coup. One United States newspaper chronicled the trans-Atlantic diasporic nature of these connections with an article on a Barbados-born, American citizen, Mrs. Helen Bertha Weeks, who after years of volunteer work in social welfare in the United States travelled to Ghana in 1966 to, as she said, “help my people.” The newspaper described her bringing “tons of clothing” as well as “thousands” of books and medical and hospital supplies. Mrs. Weeks also taught boys and girls at the National Women’s Training Center in Accra “sewing and garment making.” Clearly, despite CPP efforts to decrease publicity, international donations of clothing continued to arrive my Bawku informants remembered of the time, “It was easier when they just gave us clothes.”

The campaign’s emphasis on education and persuasion ensured that while legislation was carried out in the form of by-laws the so called ‘full-out’ legislation was shelved in for the latter stages of the campaign. Mass education was preferred over legislation because it was believed to counteract the ‘individualization’ that was thought


587 Group Interview, 30 October 2010, Bawku Township, Bawku, Upper East Region, Ghana.
to come with formal education and of course legislation. Urbanization and unemployment rates bred fears of unrest and as a result wage-earning opportunities were encouraged through the expansion of Builders Brigades. However, Ghanaian responses to Builders Brigades exemplified the negative side of Nkrumah’s efforts to decrease unemployment among youth. Jeffrey Ahlman noted that critics reacted to Builders Brigades by creating stories about the Brigades and their members. Ironically, they believed that at the heart of the Brigade’s problems “was the corruption and coercion of the Ghanaian youth.” 588 The power and corruption which the stated exhibited in Nkrumah’s latter years was articulated in Builders Brigade chants. Richard Rathbone recorded one sung in the Asante camps in 1958:

‘Bajuor Akoto dwane o, Nkrumah eba o / Bafuor Akoto’
‘[a founder and then leader of the NLM] ran away, Nkrumah is coming’

As Rathbone argued, this repetitive chant popular in the camps captured the “new political reality with brutal simplicity” – a reality in which the permanence and dominance of Nkrumah was now undisputed. 589

While in Bawku Township in 2010, I discussed with a group of Kusasi and Mamprusi women their memories of Nkrumah-era anti-nudity campaigns. After having remained silent for the entire conversation, one elderly female informant interjected, paused for a moment, and exclaimed in Kusasi: “Put some clothes on or Nkrumah will get you!” 590 While I waited for the elderly women’s statement to be translated into

588 Ahlman, 100.
589 Rathbone, 149.
590 Group Interview, 30 October 2010, Bawku Township, Bawku, Upper East Region, Ghana.
English, I observed the entire group of women – young and old, Mamprusi and Kusasi, rural and ‘urban’, break into laughter. We had up to this moment not discussed ‘politics’ in Bawku on account of present-day ethnic tensions in the township. Yet this otherwise quiet, elderly woman’s statement suggested a tongue-in-check politics about the anti-nudity efforts and indeed north-easterners’ perspectives of the post-independence state under Nkrumah. When I inquired after the statement’s context, it was explained to me that this was a scolding given to children by their mothers. If this is true, then the light-hearted scolding speaks to Nkrumah’s widely known focus on youth but also the anti-nudity campaigns’ focus on children and the conduct of mothers. Kudjoe especially noted Bawku as a town where children more than adults went about nude. And though by indigenous perceptions children’s nudity was more about intimacy and liminality defined through age-relations, in Nkrumah’s Ghana it became a target for education, demonstration and even legislation.

By 1965 – a year before the coup - the language of undesirable practices was changing and the Social Advancement Unit referred to targeted practices as “Nudity/Shabby dress, scarification, clitoridectomy and Immorality.” Immorality was a new category and it was explained that this phase was added to the campaign out of fears concerning the increase in urbanization and the effects of unemployment on youth. The fact that the campaigns were not re-invented to reflect the persistent problem of unemployment points to the belief that in the North anti-nudity efforts could not move too quickly. As one excerpt from 1960 warned:

591 Social Advancement Unit of the Ministry of Social Welfare: Progress Report for the Period October 1964 to March, 1965,” Anti-Nudity Campaign, NAGT 5/2/8
Any attempt to embark on a direct course of action to eradicate a social system which is deeply rooted in both tradition and local economy is most likely to create new problems of needs and maladjustment […] accentuating poor economic and health factors. For example, to force [someone] who has neither enough water, even for drinking, nor sufficient expendable [income] to wear clothes may result in the person’s being forced to wear dirty clothes, feed improperly and live generally unhealthily – which may be worse than the original evil of nudity. Such a direct action is also likely to destroy the people’s sense of balance, dignity and character.\(^{592}\)

The desire to develop the North gradually is reminiscent of colonial attitudes and as Jean Allman has noted the campaigns were the re-inscription of “old (colonial and pre-colonial) stories in new national ways.”\(^{593}\) And though the NLC tried at first to dismantle much of the paramilitary style of the Builders Brigades it eventually settled on continuity extending the camps in 1967 to approximately 78 camps. The main reason for keeping the camps was because of persistent fears regarding unemployment and rural and urban unrest.\(^{594}\) Thus, the implausibility of dismantling Builder Brigades - coupled with this added focus on ‘Immorality’ in the campaigns – reflected these persistent concerns. As we shall see in the following Chapter, these persistent concerns about children and youth shaped the way fragile, post-coup states sought to combat undesirable practices.

\(^{592}\) Principal Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Accra, to The Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Upper Region, Bolgatanga, 3, September, 1960, “Memorandum on Nudity in the Northern and Upper Regions”, Anti-Nudity Campaign, Upper Region, NAGT 9/2/6

\(^{593}\) Allman, 160.

\(^{594}\) Ahlman, 104.
Chapter 7


Post-Nkrumah governments approached campaigns against undesirable customs with a particular focus on Northern youth and children. Though Nkrumah was intent on quickly extending CPP reach in the North through the promotion of wage-earning, surplus accumulation and consumption, his approach to developing Northern Ghana was consistent with late-colonial development schemes. In contrast, post-coup governments focused on swift eradication of undesirable practices. The desire was that they be handled with a certain measure of expediency through schemes ubiquitously referred to as ‘crash-campaigns.’ These campaigns were facilitated through committees such as the “Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices” and the “Ghana Society for the Protection of Children” which focussed on female circumcision, tribal markings and nudity. Aside from the expediency of these efforts, there were two important changes from the Nkrumah-era campaigns. First was the overwhelming concern for the ‘child’ and the effects of so-called backward, undesirable customs on children and youth in Northern Ghana. Certainly, CPP policies on youth prioritized children and anti-nudity organizer Hannah Kudjoe often spoke about children being the future ‘torch-bearers’ of the nation. However, in the post-coup period this focus on children translated into increased anxieties regarding their welfare and morality. The second change was the shift in the campaign’s focus from nudity to prostitution. While nudity, female circumcision and tribal marks remained targets, this
new concern for prostitution reflected increased urbanization in the Northern capital of Tamale. Tamale’s growth attracted young, educated men and women from rural areas searching for employment. The increased visibility of young women in public spaces – particularly in the evenings – sparked imagined moral crises. Since colonial and post-colonial officials focussed much on young women’s reproduction and domesticity, so-called ‘illicit’ activities of patronizing or working at bars and nightclubs (characterized as ‘prostitution’) came to the forefront of debates. In defending the morality of young women and the sanctity of marriage and the family, the potent image of the ‘child’ became the driving force behind campaign activities. The swiftness with which post-Nkrumah governments sought to eradicate undesirable practices was due to the increased international efforts of “Save the Children’s Fund.” In this sense, the question of who was the best trustee of Ghana’s children – and thus its future – played out through the domestic and international rhetoric of ‘modernization’ which emphasized, among other things, the ‘modern’ nuclear family. To combat undesirable practices swiftly and absolutely, governments needed to move from the markets and other public spaces discussed in Chapter Six and into the homes and bedrooms of Ghanaians.

With the 1966 military coup, Nkrumah and the CPP were replaced with a succession of short-lived governments. The first two administrations whose activities make up the bulk of this chapter were the National Liberation Council (1966-1969) followed by the Progress Party under Kofi Busia (1969-1972). Afterward came the National Redemption Council under Lt-Col. Acheampong (1972-1975), the Supreme Military Council (1975-78), the Union Government (1978), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and the Peoples National Party under Hilla Limann (1979) and, by
1981 the Provisional National Defense Council under Flt-Lt Jerry Rawlings. According to Paul Nugent, the governing parties of these two decades behaved rather cyclically, oscillating back and forth between political traditions loosely categorized as either Busia/Danquah or Nkrumahist.\footnote{Paul Nugent, *Big Men, Small Boys and Politics in Ghana: Power, Ideology and the Burden of History, 1982-1994* (London: Pinter, 1995), 6-7.} Transcripts from rallies held in 1969 amidst the transition from the National Liberation Council (NLC) to the People’s Party stress the duties of Northern citizens during this tumultuous period, reminding “all law abiding and peaceful citizens” that the lifting of the ban on political party activities ensured Ghana’s return to civilian rule. At a rally in Bunkpurugu (just south of the Upper East Region) that May, connections were drawn between the eradication of nudity and undesirable practices and Ghana’s future political stability.

> Whether this country will see the democratic state we all hanker after will depend upon what use we make of this opportunity. If you want to be counted, put some clothes on. Ghana is fast advancing, and is considered one of the best developed countries of Africa. Consequently, we cannot afford to retain these old practices and customs which cast a slur on our national image and prestige. It must be our aim to rid the country of all drawbacks.\footnote{Address by Mr. H.A. Nuamah, Assistant Commissioner of Police and Chairman of the Northern Regional Committee of Administration at a rally at Bunkpurugu on 12th May 1969 on Nudity and other Undesirable Practices, *Nudity, Tribal Markings and Other Ceremonial Practices in the Northern Region*, NAGT 8/2/216}

The phrase ‘if you want to be counted, put some clothes on’ implicates citizenship-building in this process and particularly the desire for all Ghanaians to realize their duties as citizens in upholding this prestige. With this rhetoric, those who continued to practice backward practices which ‘cast a slur on our national image’ were not only not citizens, but actively holding back the nation from its rightful course of development. With the
oscillating nature of Ghanaian politics, the question of whether a Nkrumahist or Danquah/Busia political tradition would define development and citizenship was at issue. Many of the Nkrumah’s supporters felt disillusioned in the years leading up to the military coup. As Ayi Kwei Armah illustrated through the imagery of ‘rot’ and decay in The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born, many wondered whether this uplift remained the preserve of those politically connected who continued to run on networks of corruption and bribery. Workers who had previously offered large support to the CPP felt betrayed by the government’s co-option and subsequent prohibition of labour unions in 1959. Many believed the system was still rigged against them. Nowhere was this more evident than in Nkrumah’s interventions in Bawku.

Nkrumah’s drive to the uplift of the ‘common’ man involved the disassembling of chieftaincy structures and as Richard Rathbone has noted, the damage done to chieftaincy during the Nkrumah era, though uneven, was almost irreparable. But this unevenness resulted from how the CPP approached chieftaincy in ‘remote areas.’ In the north-east, for example, Nkrumah decided that rather than do away with chieftaincy the CPP would disassemble Mamprusi paramount status and install (enskin) a Kusasi chief as Bawkunaba for Bawku. From the Mamprusi perspective, this was an intrusion into the realm of Mamprusi-Kusasi local politics which violated the rights sanctified by the British as perceived autochthonous rulers. Conversely, the Kusasi viewed the move as a long-awaited shift in power relations set against them since colonial rule. For Nkrumah,


598 ‘Enskinment’ is a term used in the North to describe the installment of chiefs. It is similar to ‘enstoolment’ in Asante. While enskinment points to the importance of animal skins in the investiture, enstoolment focuses on the Asante stool as the material symbol of power.
the enskinment of a Kusasi chief in Bawku was less about disassembling chieftaincy than reforming it. The aim was to reform chieftaincy by breaking down power structures institutionalized under indirect rule. The enskinment of a Kusasi Bawkunaba in 1958 occurred alongside the reorganization of anti-nudity efforts in the North. In providing wage-earning opportunities to youth, the CPP focused on north-eastern groups such as Fra Fra and Kusasi who were hitherto not connected to Mamprusi ruling structure. This experiment in citizenship building through the provision of wage-earning opportunities worked to further embitter Mamprusis. As Ladouceur observed, this bitterness towards Kusasi enskinment cut across class lines in ways which hardened ethnic identification. Put simply, the enskinment brought Mamprusi commoner and nobility together in collective rebuke of Nkrumah and CPP. Further, Nkrumah’s Kusasi sympathies fed rumours that Mamprusis were behind the failed assassination attempt on Nkrumah in the north-eastern town of Kulungungu in 1962. The rumours led to state-sanctioned mass detentions of both Mamprusis and Moshis, many of whom were former chiefs and families de-stooled in 1958. Despite Nkrumah’s rhetoric about disassembling chieftaincy structures, in remote areas such as the north-east chieftaincy remained an important tool for party politics. Rather than break completely, it seems chieftaincy structures “bent with the wind.”


600 Ladouceur, Chiefs and politicians: the politics of regionalism in Northern Ghana, 590.

601 Rathbone, 161-162.
7.1 Prostitution, youth, and ‘loose women’ in Tamale, Northern Ghana

While anti-nudity seemed to dominate the CPP’s efforts in the North, successive governments chose to emphasize short-term, crash-campaigns against prostitution, using terms such as ‘social evil’, ‘arch enemy’, and ‘crusade.’ The increased focus on prostitution is explained by officials’ judgments that unlike prostitution the persistence of nudity was confined to older generations. As one 1972 memo stated, the problem [of nudity] was not one of adolescent girls, whether they be educated or uneducated, but rather those “aged, illiterate die-hards who are so deeply entrenched that nothing seems important enough to motivate them to transform their lives.” Increasingly, the ability to transform lives was judged as residing with those very ‘adolescent girls,’ often educated, who travelled to the Tamale for work and school. According to the Minister of Social Welfare in 1966, Mrs. Susanna Al-Hassan, the concern lay with “the soaring rate of depravity and lewdness among our younger generation especially school girls and young working girls.” Unlike anti-nudity, where concerns were about those considered ignorant and uneducated (which needed to be dealt with through mass education) now, the focus shifted to those who were educated and therefore perceived to be willfully deviant – such as prostitutes.

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602 “An outline of a crash campaign against prostitution,” Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices, NAGT 8/5/308

603 David Ahadu Iddisah, Lt. Col. Regional Commissioner, Tamale to Sec. to the N.R. C. Office of the N.R.C. Accra, 16th Nov. 1972, Nudity, Tribal Markings and Other Ceremonial Practices in the Northern Region, NAGT 8/2/216

604 “An outline of a crash campaign against prostitution,” Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices, NAGT 8/5/308
In Northern Ghana the issue of prostitution came to the forefront of the state’s agenda only by the 1950s and 60s but in many areas of colonial Africa it had long been a concern. The prevalence of prostitution in the colonial economies of cities such as Nairobi and in places of intensive capital deployment such as the Zambian Copperbelt, was evident in the attention afforded it by historians of Africa. Scholars such as Jane Parpart judged the colonial state’s interest in prostitution as speaking to broader anxieties regarding gender and social control in which a wide-range of women’s conduct was characterized as ‘wicked’ or ‘misbehaving’.605 Under these terms, debates concerning prostitution were understood as anxieties about women’s independence and migration from rural to urban spaces. While this work did much to critique the actions of the colonial state the lives and motivations of actual women involved remained far less understood. With Luise White’s 1990 path-breaking history of prostitution in colonial Nairobi, scholars began to view prostitution less as a state of perpetual male dependence and victimhood - less, in other words, as a necessary evil practiced by women with little recourse – and more as a method for marginalized women to accrue capital of their own.606 While still dependent on male demand, the nature and manner of social reproduction was largely the prerogative of women. Among those who practiced the malaya form in Nairobi, for example, cash accumulated from transactions provided women the economic independence to keep their own apartments and create female-centered kinship networks based in the city. Far from positing a rosy picture of


606 White, Comforts of Home.
prostitution, Luise White and those who have taken up her perspective have done much to capture the social and economic realities – and opportunities – provided through the informal economy in a humane way that portrays women as neither victims nor deviants.

While Luise White’s informants identified themselves as prostitutes, many urban women labeled as prostitutes or ‘loose women’ in the 60s and 70s were not necessarily involved in this branch of the informal economy. As in Tamale, many women were simply school girls or young women who seemed to transgress gender norms by embracing the mobility and independence town life offered. As exemplified in Hodgson and McCurdy’s “Wicked” Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa, narratives of misbehaving urban women were familiar terrains of critique for historians of gender and urbanization in Africa.607 Remarking on scholarship prior to the 1990s, Kathleen Sheldon has noted how analyses of women in African cities were relatively scarce compared to men and the African city was often interpreted through demographics as ‘male’.608 This gendering of the city has been critically explored most notably by Richard Waller and Andrew Burton who have addressed the gendering of youth delinquency as male in colonial Africa as well as that of the underemployed ‘underclass’ in Dar es Salaam, respectively.609 Though colonial officials sought to gender the African city as male, particularly in cities established during colonial rule such as Nairobi and Harare, for many cities in West Africa, such as Accra, Dakar, and Lomé, women enjoyed

608 Sheldon ed. Courtyards, Markets, and City Streets, 6
a long presence. Their numbers, often equalling those of men, make this male configuration of the city particularly misleading.\textsuperscript{610} Despite these women’s important roles in the making of cities, the male configuration prevailed, ensuring cities remained seen as “male domains that were dangerous for women or as the abode of women who were themselves dangerous.”\textsuperscript{611}

The idea was that somehow women in cities – and particularly educated women – were themselves dangerous carried over into 1960s and 70s Africa. This is poignantly described by the character of Maiguru in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel, \textit{Nervous Conditions}. In an effort to allow her niece, Tambudzai, to attend a convent school in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, Maiguru cautioned her husband against making false connections between education and the corruption of young women:

Don’t you remember, when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose […] It wasn’t a question of associating with this race or that race at the time. People were prejudiced of educated women. Prejudiced. That’s why they said we weren’t decent. That was in the fifties. Now we are into the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe the same things. After all this time and when we have seen nothing to say it is true. I don’t know what people mean by a loose woman – sometimes she is someone who walks the streets, sometimes she is an educated woman, sometimes she is a successful man’s daughter or she is simply beautiful. Loose or decent, I don’t know. All I know is that if our daughter Tambudzai is not a decent person now, she never will be, no matter where she goes to school.\textsuperscript{612}

\textsuperscript{610} Sheldon ed., \textit{Courtyards, Markets, and City Streets}, 6

\textsuperscript{611} Ibid.

While Mairigu’s character married a mission headmaster and is thus considered a respectable educated woman, the labels of ‘loose’ and ‘prostitute’ continued to plague those unattached, educated young girls who chose to reside in African cities through to the 1970s. The very ambiguity of what constituted a ‘loose woman’ – someone who walks the streets or someone who is educated – was evident in the actions taken by the Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices, the vanguard of anti-prostitution crash-campaigns in Tamale.

The Regional Committee, which included ‘concerned citizens’ from the Ministry of Health, Regional Office, Police, and Legion Club as well as various religious representatives from Catholic, Muslim, Presbyterian, Methodist and Anglican churches, reflected Tamale’s increasing growth and the perceived need for the state and religion to work together in the face of these changes.\textsuperscript{613} The inclusion of the Tamale Urban Council spoke to the importance placed on sound urban planning at this time in the town’s history. While today Tamale is considered one of the fastest growing cities in Ghana, back in 1907, it was little more than a cluster of villages when the British decided to shift headquarters there from Gambaga.\textsuperscript{614} As administrative headquarters for the whole of the North, the British turned Tamale into a fairly small town, composed primarily of Dagomba peoples, but also attracting outsiders from north and south in the form of soldiers, clerks, and craftsmen. Over time the town grew, but remained small as part of

\textsuperscript{613} “Minutes of the Meeting of Regional Committee for Social Education Programs Campaign Against Prostitution and other Undesirable social Practices held at the Regional Office, on Thurs. 7, July 1965,” \textit{Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices}, NAGT 8/5/308

\textsuperscript{614} Allman and Parker, 62.
the colonial government’s desire to insulate the North from corruptive, southern influences. In his study of blacksmiths in Tamale, Wyatt MacGaffey argued that this “rusticity” of Tamale insulated its inhabitants from the harsh economic downturns felt by holders of “regular jobs” in larger, established cities of Accra and Kumasi in the mid-1960s. In this sense, it was the informal economy that MacGaffey implies kept Tamale inhabitants afloat. While this inference that Tamale was somehow less affected by economic downturn is arguable, it does explain why state officials began targeting perceived prostitution. While Tamale remained a small town compared to the likes of Kumasi or Accra, it was nevertheless engulfed in concerns regarding urbanization and modernization as well as all of the anxieties that come along with such developments. Certainly, Accra had often taken a paternalist tone toward the underdeveloped northern interior as discussed in Chapters Five and Six with slavery and anti-nudity. Now, the short-lived governments stealthily sought to advance the North by combating supposed backward customs through crash-campaigns.

7.2 ‘Rounding up Prostitutes’: Crash Campaigns and unruly women in peri-urban Tamale

For the Committee, the crash-campaign approach to prostitution meant embracing measures that were highly reactionary and geared to the primary goal of controlling young women’s mobility. Young girls frequented night clubs and flouted the education acquired by them in Tamale by choosing to “loiter about” instead of taking jobs

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“commensurate to their education.” Suggestions of how to temper their intransigence ranged from urging businesses to employ loitering girls and women to urging young girls not to “drift” into urban areas in the first place. Of course, the desire to keep girls in rural areas was tied to the late colonial era’s emphasis on domesticity and the creation of employment opportunities at home through women’s institutions for training in crafts and housewifery. However for those girls who were employed at these establishments in Tamale, the restrictions the Committee sought to place upon both employees and their employers were strict. One requirement was that owners review the pay of the girls in their employment to “avoid using them for immoral practices.” In other words, regulating their accumulation under the pretense of ensuring they were not engaging in prostitution on the side. Other suggestions were more pedestrian, such as enforcing a training course for girls who worked and the posting of rules of their employment as well as the Minister setting general rules to be displayed on premises.

While female employees were seen as a contributing problem, they did not make up the core of the issue. Rather, officials believed it was young girls who were frequenting the bars who should be targeted. To stem the influx of unattached women, the committee recommended businesses refuse admission to “unscrupulous” girls; that employees remain “strong and vigilant” in checking children from entering; that boys and girls under 17 be prohibited from bars and night clubs; and that those above 17 but under

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616 “Minutes of the Meeting of Regional Committee for Social Education Programs Campaign Against Prostitution and other Undesirable social Practices held at the Regional Office, on Thurs. 7, July 1965,” *Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices*, NAGT 8/5/308

617 “An outline of a crash campaign against prostitution,” *Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices*, NAGT 8/5/308
be served only soft drinks. Taken together, these suggestions revealed a desire on the part of the Committee to treat unattached women as children by infantilizing them as a justification for prohibiting their movement and behavior. This was not all rhetoric. In some areas of Africa, young unmarried women were considered to be perpetually childlike and undeserving of adult respect.\textsuperscript{618} In Tamale, this was exemplified in the suggestion that hotels turn away young, unattached women looking for a place to stay and instead send them to the morally upright Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA).

Though the Committee believed the creation of “good and healthy recreational activities” would do much to stem the tide of lewdness, it still looked to Police to enforce its morality campaigns.\textsuperscript{619} The Police were instructed under Act 29 to suspend licenses of hotels and bars for non-cooperation. However, one of the more distressing extensions of Police authority was in the launching of nighttime raids in bars and night clubs. These raids, sometimes referred to benignly as ‘checks’, had the specific purpose of rounding-up suspected prostitutes as evidenced in an extract from Daily Graphic dated 8\textsuperscript{th} August, 1967 entitled, “5 Women Discharged”:

Five middle-aged women alleged to be practicing prostitution have [been] acquitted and discharged at the Tamale Circuit Court, for “lack of evidence”. They are Abibata Dagomba, Ogbe Dagomba, Bugli Dagomba, Adisa Dagomba and Saratu Dagomba. All the women pleaded not guilty. In his ruling, Mr. A. Quashie Sam, presiding Judge,

\textsuperscript{618} Brett L. Shadle, “Girl Cases”: Marriage and Colonialism in Gusiland (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), xxi.

\textsuperscript{619} These ‘good and healthy’ activities included familiar suggestions of sewing and lace-making to ‘puppet shows’, the latter clearly exemplifying efforts to infantilize these young women.
remarked that to prove the offence, the accused persons must be found engaged in certain “overt acts” which constituted loitering and importuning. He said it was not sufficient to assume that the presence of the accused persons at a drinking bar constituted an offence, adding the prosecution had failed to prove the ‘material ingredients’ thereto.620

The frustration the Police felt in not being able to prosecute supposed prostitutes for lack of evidence can be seen in their blaming of “important men.” Demonstrating how far back this Police action went, a Police rep testified in a meeting held in 1965 under the Nkrumah regime, that although the Police continued their raids in the night on the prostitutes their efforts were hindered by the allegation that “married people in important positions encouraged the young girls to the ‘evil.’”621 Frustrated with their inability to harass important men and control young women, the Committee’s suggestions became more draconian, and the Committee openly debated the idea of implementing curfews for young women. Their inspiration came from a suggestion to adopt the system in place in ‘some American states’ where a curfew was instituted to prohibit all girls under the age of 17 years to go outside their homes after a particular hour.622 Ultimately, the suggestion floundered as the Committee feared that, while legal in some of the United States, such a curfew might infringe upon laws in Ghana. Rightly so, the Secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Community Development S.A. Obuobi distanced himself from the


621 “Minutes of the Meeting of Regional Committee for Social Education Programs Campaign Against Prostitution and other Undesirable social Practices held at the Regional Office, on Thurs. 7, July 1965,” Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices, NAGT NRG 8/5/308

622 Ibid.
Committee’s increasingly problematic suggestions, responding in November of 1965 with a resounding ‘No’ and a request that the question of a curfew be dropped altogether, since on the national level he could not support the curfew.

The inability of the Committee and the Police to check prostitution was not blamed on their illegal attempts to prosecute women without evidence of wrongdoing or on the proposals to import American curfews that would violate existing Ghanaian laws but rather on the ravages of modernity. As one Police rep told the Committee, “‘modern civilization’ had brought “its trail of several evils”, making their [Police] work hard.623 Controlling the negative by-products of “modern civilization” was a conundrum that had long plagued colonial officials in the North. The question of how to foster economic development whilst maintaining changelessness had surfaced yet again. Having climbed the colonial ‘steep slope of civilization’ it seemed to the Committee and all those concerned citizens that Northern Ghana was modernizing at a destabilizing rate. Yet, if modernity was the problem it could, with greater bureaucratic regulation, also be the cure. Rather than decrease the Committee’s activities, intervention was expanded with a view to further infantilize and exert trusteeship over unattached, young women. Far from hindering further action, these early failures proved that it was not the state that was to be blamed for being unable to handle modernity; rather, it was parents who could not control their children in the face of such changes. The confluence of these factors led to the narrative of the ‘unfit’ African parent.

623 Ibid.
7.3 ‘Parental Mismanagement’ and the state in Northern Ghana

For all its efforts, the Regional Committee blamed parental mismanagement for the persistence of prostitution, arguing that parental control “could not be relied upon as it was not effective in our modern society.” The state believed only it could regulate modernity and its negative by-products. However, this analogy of the state as natural trustee of progress was commonplace in colonial times and in arrogating control of young urban women from parents, post-coup governments sought to re-package the colonial narrative of trusteeship. In the colonial version, the state played the role of trustee over Northerners who were considered at an infantile or child-like stage of development. An example of this logic is found in an Annual Report on the social, moral and material condition of people in the Northern Territories in 1936, one colonial administrator likened his job in the North to that of a parent watching a child grow-up:

It is extraordinarily difficult to report from year to year on such a subject. A ‘professional parent’ with pride and possibly conceit in his offspring would find it difficult to write a week to week or month to month or perhaps even a year to year report on change or progress in development of his latest born. It is only when some outside observer, who has seen the infant prodigy in its cradle and returns after a lapse of months or years since last seeing it, makes some random remark about the physical or mental growth of the infant that the parent realizes that there possibly has been some change to which his continued proximity has blinded him.

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624 “Minutes of the Meeting of Regional Committee for Social Education Programs Campaign Against Prostitution and other Undesirable social Practices held at the Regional Office, on Thurs. 7, July 1965,” Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices, NAGT 8/5/308

Acting as parent or trustee over youth – and in fact the whole nation – the state sanctioned Committee sought to lay blame for the lewd and unruly behavior of young women in Tamale on the unit which had failed to control them in the first place – their biological parents. In doing this, state control, referred to as “environmental control” was seen as more effective than the basic family unit, a unit in which the colonial state had vested so much hope in maintaining social cohesion alongside development. The irony, of course, is that throughout Africa colonialism did much to precipitate the breakdown of family as a system of support. As Cynthia Brantley argued in her work on the family as a tool for colonial state-building, officials in Nyasaland worked to prioritize the nuclear family over the existing extended family, undermining the extended families’ role in providing food and resources. As discussed in Chapter Five, the diminished capabilities of parents to provide food and resources for children can be seen in the prevalence of pawning in times of hardship and famine. Ultimately, it was not the failure of biological parents, but rather the failure of the colonial state in exploiting the northern hinterland in wealth and in people.

7.4 Prostitution and the ‘modern’, nuclear family

The state’s decision to play the role of parental trustee in controlling unruly young women reflected a desire to extend the bourgeois ideal of the ‘modern’ nuclear family in 1960s Northern Ghana. The Committee’s citing of the ‘lewdness’ among the young “especially flirtations between school girls and some responsible men in high positions”

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was worrying as was the fact that many of these important men were alleged by the
Police to be married.\(^{627}\) This added another layer on the pressing matter of prostitution;
not only was it corrupting young girls, but also families. According to Laura Briggs,
concerns like those in Tamale to protect the family unit from prostitution were common
throughout Empire. These efforts to control and sanitize prostitution facilitated
opposition movements which argued for the uplifting of nuclear families. As Briggs
further explains:

Modernity required “modern” families; prostitutes, soldiers, and unmarried laborers failed to constitute nuclear
families. Liberalism of a variety of stripes – metropolitan, missionary, and creole nationalist – envisioned an end to
state-sanctioned vice, seduced women, lecherous men, and other (archaic) forms of corruption in favour of state
repression of prostitution, healthy bodies, and racially
homogenous nuclear families.\(^{628}\)

The allegation by Police raids that it was married people in important positions
encouraging the young girls to the ‘evil’ threatened the modern family which was viewed
as a heterosexual union, made up of a married, monogamous, woman and man, and their
children. In an effort to protect this ideal in the face of prostitution, the Committee
suggested the introduction of Marriage Councils. However, this attempted incursion of
the state into the bedrooms of Ghanaians was unwelcome. The idea was eventually

\(^{627}\) “Minutes of the Meeting of Regional Committee for Social Education Programs Campaign Against
Prostitution and other Undesirable social Practices held at the Regional Office, on Thurs. 7, July 1965,”
Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices, NAGT
8/5/308

\(^{628}\) Laura Briggs, “Familiar Territory: Prostitution, Empires, and the Question of U.S. Imperialism in Puerto
Rico, 1849-1916,” in Families of a New World: Gender, Policies, and State Development in a Global Context
rejected because the Committee felt that Ghanaians considered “that problem” as secret and would not use the councils. Rather, they suggested reconciliatory councils instead.\textsuperscript{629} While the difference between marriage councils and reconciliation councils is unclear, what is certain is that at the state level, these efforts reflected an attempt to build the modern African family. This was as much about a new nation’s place in the world as it was about the prevailing modernization discourse at the time.

Though the modern family was the state perceived ideal, this did not mean young African women subscribed to it. It seems that what frustrated the Committee to no end was that the young women in Tamale transgressed this mould of the ideal husband, wife and family by co-opting it to maintain their own freedom of movement in the city. The Committee lamented that some single girls who were thrown out of bars would return to the same bar with a male companion in order to gain entry. So severe was this concern that bar keepers, hotel owners, and Police were encouraged to work together to report suspicious activity “especially when men and women customers pose themselves as husband and wives for accommodation.”\textsuperscript{630} These sorts of transgressions were not confined to Northern Ghana. As Sheldon has noted, state officials in West Africa often harassed urban women in their attempt to control the unmarried and many woman falsified their marital statuses as a survival measure.\textsuperscript{631} This was similarly noted by

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\textsuperscript{629} “Minutes of the Meeting of Regional Committee for Social Education Programs Campaign Against Prostitution and other Undesirable social Practices held at the Regional Office, on 6 August, 1965, \textit{Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices, NAGT 8/5/308}
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\textsuperscript{630} NAGT 8/5/308 Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices. “An Outline of a Crash Campaign Against Prostitution”
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\textsuperscript{631} Sheldon,11.
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Allman in 1930s Asante with the rounding up of unmarried women as a result of male officials’ concerns over the perceived destabilization resulting from so many unattached women. Far from confined to West Africa, in Kenya Wambui Otieno’s telling of her political activities in *Mau Mau’s Daughter* also speak of times when she and her colleagues went on raids during which they actually used the image or caricature of the African prostitute to fool male officials and gain entry into spaces where confidential information was held. Here, young African women not only transgressed the idea of the respectable lady and ideal middle-class family but actively harnessed the caricature of the prostitute to achieve their social and political ends.

For all these reasons, anti-prostitution became something of a figurehead for controlling young women and securing the future of the next generation of Ghanaians. Prostitution not only compromised young women and modern families, but it was also “rapidly sapping the morality of our future mothers of Ghana.” The perception of young women as first and foremost vehicles for reproduction was hardly surprising. As Audra A. Diptee and Martin Klein explained of the symbolism of children in Africa, “children are the means by which all societies not only biologically, but also culturally, reproduce.” This was important to post-independence Ghana where children represented the young nation-state’s sustainability. The narrative of ‘parental

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634 “An outline of a crash campaign against prostitution,” *Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices*, NAGT 8/5/308

mismanagement’ provided room for the state to exert control over unruly female children and youth. It also initiated a struggle for trusteeship over the Ghanaian ‘child.’ With such an unstable political terrain of successive military coups happening not just in Ghana but throughout Africa, it is not surprising international organizations such as “Save the Children” became eager to take advantage and re-assert their interests in post-independence Africa.

7.5 “There is nothing as appealing as a small child in distress – except another”: SCF’s re-entry into Africa

In 1950, Dr. Leslie Housden, medical adviser to Save the Children, wrote excitedly about the possibilities of Save the Children Fund’s (SCF) re-entry into black Africa. “There is nothing as appealing as a small child in distress – except another. It matters nothing that the child is black. If the Save the Children Fund can again extend its work to lands where small back children are suffering, it will re-open a memorable chapter in its history.”

The memorable chapter Dr. Housden referred to was the organization’s involvement in the 1930s. It began in 1931 with an international conference on the Child and continued on a shoe-string with select projects in Ethiopia (1936) and Nigeria (1945). His desire to re-assert the SCF in post-war Africa resulted from the organization’s decline in activities in Eastern Europe. Also, as nationalist sentiments increased there was a sense in the air that the colonies were nearing independence.

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637 Ibid.
During the colonial era the ‘child’ was not always an easy entry point into Africa. As this thesis has argued, metropolitan inquiries into the status of women and children often elicited frustration, falsification, or outright silence from British colonial officials in West Africa. For example, SCF sought formal support from the Colonial Office immediately following the Second World War. The then Secretary of State, Ormsby-Gore, flatly rejected the notion of officially supporting SCF’s activities. He reasoned that Colonial Office support would necessarily hold the Office responsible for SCF activities. With its withdrawal from the “iron curtain countries,” SCF came under the leadership of Countess Mountbatten. Mountbatten turned the organization’s focus toward Africa in the hope of asserting trusteeship over African children – and states. As Housden explained of the necessity for SCF in Africa:

In most places inhabited by black races, children abound, their large numbers tending to decrease the affection in which they are held. They are too little rare to be precious. Ask a Moslem mother why her baby died and she will answer “God”, adding “Allah will send me another”. I have never been able to consider children in hoards. Every hoard breaks down into single children: the focus is on one at a time…If the Save the Children Fund is to live up to its name it must save every child from misery, ill-treatment and starvation. Others may try their hand at limiting the numbers. The excerpt implied SCF’s mission to combat the African state and negligent African mothers. Invoking the narrative of parental mismanagement, the message was clear that

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640 Ibid.
African parents, and particularly African mothers, were unfit trustees of their own children. The Regional Committee in Tamale arrived to the same conclusion when it argued parental control was ineffective in modern society. The difference was that while paternalistic, the Committee was not carrying forward a colonial, racist framework. For the Committee, it was a matter of state sovereignty in controlling what it believed to be the negative by-products of modernization and urbanization that were corrupting young women and children. For SCF, it was a belief handed down from nineteenth century scientific racism of a natural tendency for Africans toward parental mismanagement. In other words, for the Committee these problems were structural, whilst for SCF parental mismanagement exemplified the continued need of European trusteeship in Africa.

7.6 Technologies of Trusteeship: Radio, Print, Cinema

On the ground, the struggle for the African child was fought through various technologies of trusteeship, including radio, cinema, and print media. The expediency of the crash campaign rhetoric ensured that this was a race to demonstrate whether the state or international organizations would effectively protect children and youth. In Ghana, the Tamale committee went on the defensive and used means familiar to those noted in Chapter Six such as rallies and speeches from prominent chiefs and leaders. The Committee also exerted greater control over cinema and radio. With the use of radio, for example, campaigners could take the message of morality and undesirable customs from public spaces to people’s homes and places of work. Additionally, in controlling the attendance of school-age children in cinemas, concerned citizens could safeguard against kids going to see illicit films and skipping school. The Committee also required the Regional Education Office prevent children from attending all films at the cinema houses.
except pictures that are educational and to check the theatres to ensure there were no defaulters. The regulation of cinema was a tool for control used in the colonial period. In the Gold Coast, British officials after the Second World War sought to closely monitor films for fear of the political unrest and nationalist stirrings among ex-soldiers. Despite the Committee’s use of cinema and radio in the domestic sphere to control prostitution and monitor the morality of youth, efforts were marred by the political instability caused by military coups which only afforded short-term governments little time to launch ‘crash campaigns.’ Because of their short-term nature these campaigns could not achieve their intended goals. By the late 1960s, the African state’s prerogative as parent and trustee was hanging by a thread.

In contrast to Ghanaian administrations, the Save the Children Fund and its United Nations counterpart organizations undertook both short and long term operations. SCF offered emergency assistance to women and children as part of its long term strategy in Africa. This strategy was outlined in its publication, “The World’s Children, Monthly Journal of Child Care and Development Considered from the World Viewpoint.” In one article on the Central Kivu Province of Congo in 1965, the Fund discussed the organization of an air-lift of milk supplies to alleviate hunger and famine among children.

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642 Petitions for censorship of cinema in the colonies occurred prior to World War II and the appeals made to the Colonial Office by the Manchester Diocesan Association for Preventative and Rescue Work in 1924 are but one example. The Association took issue with European and American films portraying scenes of civilized life in “non-European counties for display”, noting that films such as “The White Man’s Grave” shown in the Gold Coast incited riots due to a scene where a “white man kicks a native,” TNA U.K., CO 323/932
there. While the immediacy of the situation propelled the scheme forward, in its Press release the Fund outlined the long-term goal of the mission, which was to implement a mother and child welfare service where mothers could be shown “how to feed their children with locally available foodstuffs.” Thus, concluded the press release, “short term emergency action will grow into permanent mother and child welfare service in the Kivu, and in accordance with the aim of The Save the Children Fund overseas the Congolese will be trained to help themselves.”

Dovetailing with the parental mismanagement narrative, the SCF’s activities focused on the incapacities of African mothers in feeding and managing their own children, as though famine was of the mothers’ own creation. An earlier excerpt from a November 1950 edition entitled “Fighting Superstition” an SCF doctor referred to mortality rates in a region of southern Sudan as largely the result of parental mismanagement which could only be rectified by an SCF team to “teach the people who to keep their children alive and to keep them well.” Interestingly, the language of gradualism was used by the SCF and activities were to go slowly to prevent damage which could result from acting in haste in areas where “ancient tribal and family systems and superstitions” had to be negotiated.

Articles put SCF actions into words for potential donors, but it was the images that stirred European desires for trusteeship over African children. In the early 1960s, the CPP government had realized the powerful impact of images and like his colonial


predecessors Nkrumah hesitated in bringing this type of publicity to women and children. While anti-nudity seemed to be a viable entry point into the North, Nkrumah’s reorganization of Kudjoe’s efforts reflected the reality that circulating photos of ‘needy nudes’ internationally might have negative implications. In the CPP’s opinion, publicity gave the impression that nudity was more prevalent than it was. But most importantly, images would communicate an unintended message that the Ghanaian state could not manage its own affairs. The corruption that plagued the twilight of Nkrumah’s rule, followed by a succession of military coups, only added to the impression the state could not control its own development.

During this period of government instability, organizations such as SCF actively published images of ‘poor,’ black, African children. In these images, children appeared in photos alone, which gave the appearance of neglect. In one particularly symbolic photo taken in Sudan, a child – crying – is sitting naked in a hut. The caption under the photo described the baby as sitting with faced covered with flies in a hut made of cow dung and mud. 645

Not only does the child appear naked and alone, but the scene also infers unhygienic living conditions and, since the child is crying s/he appears hungry. Together these elements make up the powerful image of the starving, African child. It is an image that is as ubiquitous today in popular media as it was in these SCF journals in the 1950s and 60s. Of course, the irony is that during the colonial era, schemes for providing more food and greater stability worked to unravel the fabric of African families and villages.
and contributed to the hunger, conflict and disruption they sought to end.\footnote{Brantley, “Colonial Africa: Transforming Families for their own Benefit,” 139-155.} Combining the image of the child with the image of famine implies that these crises were simply natural to Africa and that African children endured chronic malnutrition at the hands of mothers and states that were incapable of managing these crises on their own.\footnote{For an interesting analysis on the manufacturing of the 2005 food crisis in Niger, see Xavier Crombé and Jean-Hervé Jézéquel (eds) A Not-So Natural Disaster, Niger 05, London: Hurst and Company, 2009. In particular, see Barbara Cooper’s chapter, “Chronic Malnutrition and the Trope of the Bad Mother”, 147-168.}

Certainly, for an organization that was looking to expand its activities in Africa – and enlarge its coffers from reader donations- these sorts of pictures of children with flies on their faces gave renewed life to colonial rescue narratives.

### 7.7 Save the Children (?): rescue narratives, northern ‘orphans’ and adoption

In July of 1969, two expatriates working with the United Nations Development Programme in Accra heard of the plight of Northern children and sent an adoption application through the Community Development and Social Welfare Office in Tamale.

> I am given to understand that quite a number of orphaned/neglected/unwanted children have been admitted into your Tamale Children’s Home from the Upper Region and I shall be grateful if you will let me know as soon as possible whether or not there are such children available for adoption by these two gentlemen.\footnote{Application for Adoption,” Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, Accra. 24 July 19 to Chief Social Welfare and Community Development Officer, H.K. A Sakey, Ghana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, NAGT 8/12/53}
The application went on to specify the applicants’ preference. “One of the applicants wants a child with fair complexion, but the other has no preferences.” In accordance with the ideal of the ‘modern,’ racially homogenized nuclear family, the letter goes on to say that “the applicants are both married and have good homes with congenial environments for proper upbringing of children.”

The adoption request outlined the racial prerequisites of the ultimate rescue narrative and the extent to which international interest by the late 1960s had parleyed into the commodification of the African child through international print and media. Clearly, the perception among the UN expatriates was that Northern children, being from an underdeveloped, famine-ridden region, were parentless. This perspective is hardly surprising considering the UN’s adoption and re-drafting of the League of Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child or ‘Declaration of Geneva’ following the Second World War. In the reformulated declaration, the convention stated among other items that, “the child shall be given opportunities to grow-up in economic security, in the care of his own parents whenever possible, and in a family atmosphere of affection and understanding favourable to the full and harmonious development of his personality.”

The phrase “in the case of his own parents whenever possible” ensured that if the child is not considered to be in the UN’s subjective judgment of economic security, affection and harmony, it should be removed– or rescued.

649 One wonders whether a child such as Atawa in Chapter 5, with her ‘tribal markings’ would not have appealed to the U.N workers searching for the perfect, inter-racial family to complete the liberal, internationalist narrative of the nascent United Nations.


The UN expatriates sought to adopt Northern children from Children’s Homes. Children’s Homes were an outgrowth of the “Ghana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children” which was seen as the Social Welfare and Community Development’s move to implement the UN adopted Declaration of the Rights of the Child in Ghana.651 In a letter outlining its mission, the Society sought to reinforce its utmost commitment to international standards of the child in Ghana:

651 Ghana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, NAGT 8/12/53
It is known that cruelty to children exists because of deprivation in many ways, peculiarities in our culture, or from wilful physical assaults. Our children are made to suffer as a result of these evils which must be rooted out of our way of life in the new and progressive Ghana which we all hope to build. Children are the Nation’s precious asset; they are weak, vulnerable to influences hostile to their development and welfare; they are defenseless and, as such, they are entitled to a special claim on our love, compassion and all humanitarian instincts.652

The aims of the Society were very similar to those of the Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices. African parents were judged as incompetent and in need of education “through every possible medium to their responsibilities toward their children.” Moreover, greater control and inspection of children was encouraged under the pretense of checking and preventing neglect and cruelty. However, at the time of the adoption request in 1969, the Tamale Children’s Home was not yet functioning as an adoption outlet. The request itself highlighted the presumption that northern children were necessarily neglected or unwanted within their extended family units. Responding to the request, the Regional Social Welfare and Community Development Officer E. N. Darlington explained that while the Children’s Home was encouraged by this “early interest” he would have to decline the request since the UN workers seemed to have an unclear picture of what constituted an ‘orphan’:

...even though we have 7 children at the Home at present and five more to be collected from the Bawku Hospital yet none of these can be described as orphaned, neglected or unwanted. Some of these children have lost their mothers at birth but the fathers and other relatives are keenly

652 The Society makes its alignment with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the United Nations General Assembly clear stating that “its aims and Objects are well in tune with the progressive ideal held by the International Community, and it is with the determination to implement these Aims and Objects in Ghana that the Ghana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has begun its work”.

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interested in them. Even in the case of a set of triplets who are being temporarily housed here because it is a taboo in the tribe from which they come for a human being to have more than one child at a time, both parents are keenly interested in the children and the mother visits them from time to time. We therefore have no suitable cases for adoption at present and can only place your request on our mounting waiting list.653

The perception was that the Children’s Home in Tamale was a repository for children from the Upper Region and Bawku hospital and this was undergirded by the famines and drought which often occurred in the frontier areas of the north-east. Added to this were ethnic tensions in the area. The social and economic reality was that the late 1960s and early 1970s was not an easy time for Bawku. Kusasi and Mamprusi tensions simmered as post-coup governments flip-flopped between administrations which favoured Mamprusi authority one moment and Kusasi the next. Moreover, despite repeated petitions to reconstruct or build anew the Bawku hospital, the facility was left to grow increasingly decrepit. It is no wonder that the Social Welfare and Community Development Office in Tamale took children, mistaken as ‘orphans,’ from Bawku hospital to the Children’s Home. These children were not unwanted or orphans, but rather had no other place to go given the under-funded hospital facilities in the north-east. As the Bawku Hospital Advisory Board explained in 1965, a separate ward was proposed to house children since “often children termed as ‘orphans’ are being brought to the Hospital for adoption.”654

For example, it was reported that a 3 year old child had been found by Police sitting


654 “Bawku Hospital Advisory Board Minutes of the Meeting Held at Bawku on 18th February, 1965”, Bawku Hospital, NAGT 9/10/9
beside an unknown dead body and the Police responded by bringing this ‘healthy’ child to the Hospital for safe keeping. This showed that the children in these hospitals were not sick and most likely not orphans, either. In response, the Hospital Board decided that this was an issue for the Social Welfare Department and is likely how healthy Bawku children, misconstrued as orphans, ended up in the Tamale Children’s Home.

The establishment of the Tamale Children’s Home was not a solution to the continued hardships of north-eastern people especially since during the transition from CPP to NLC power the function and very legality of such homes was being openly debated in Ghanaian society. Originally, the Society which oversaw the Children’s Homes proclaimed that its committee members were all “voluntary workers who receive no pay for their service and who, in fact, are either in business, in the Public Services, or in the professions.” During this time of political transition, the activities of the Society came formally under the state resulting in some, such as one Mr. Baah, being dismissed. Having lost his position as Secretary of the Kumasi branch of the Child Care Society, Mr. Baah petitioned the NLC government to start his own Home. His efforts were blocked however as the office of Social Welfare and Community Development believed his sole purpose in running his own Children’s Home was to “have an opportunity to make easy money by operating lotteries from village to village.” Given that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children survived the political transition, it was declared Mr. Baah’s actions were “yet another attempt by him to get the approval of the National Liberation Council in order to strengthen his hands to pursue his nefarious scheme of

running lotteries illegally and thereby making easy money.\textsuperscript{656} He was told to either join the existing Society or abandon his scheme altogether.

The suspicion of illicit or illegal activity surrounding the Children’s Homes was not surprising given the histories of such homes in nineteenth century Britain and Empire. Like their British counterparts, Children’s Homes in Ghana were largely understood as places where orphaned children were housed for their better care. However, as Joy Parr has pointed out in her work on such homes in Canada, sometimes these establishments were conduits for child labour, placing children in situations of indentured servitude where they were apprenticed out, sometimes enduring terrible living and working conditions.\textsuperscript{657} That the state felt Mr. Baah was attempting to open a Home with the aim of profit-making through village lotteries further indicated the dangers realized by the increasing international interest in ‘the child’ to exploit, or profit, from Northern development.

Despite questions regarding the illicit nature of Children’s Homes, the two UN workers pressed their desires to obtain Northern children and in November of 1969 the Accra office petitioned Tamale to inquire whether their orphans were yet ready for adoption. There was a tone of urgency about the letter and in this way it betrayed a sense of entitlement:

The applicants concerned are still very anxious to express this satisfying experience of parenthood through adoption,

\textsuperscript{656} Ibid.

and I do hope that you would help in meeting their expectations. 658

Surely, the UN representatives believed that their biological parents failing them, these children in the Tamale home had a right to be raised in an environment heralded by the international community as safe and secure. Moreover, as UN workers and therefore gatekeepers of these standards, attaining the ‘satisfying experience of parenthood’ was not merely their desire, but also their duty. As Laura Briggs explained of adoption cases in Puerto Rico, Americans’ perception of “failed nuclear families” justified imperialist intervention.659 Thus, achieving trusteeship through adoption was not just about correcting these failed nuclear families. In post-colonial Ghana, it was considered a moral imperative.

The concern for children – the UN declaration that the child “shall be in all circumstances amongst the first to receive protection and relief”– ensured that children were the terrain on which struggles for trusteeship were fought. Moreover, it ensured their commoditization on a level far beyond that of the pawning we discussed in Chapter Five. Now, it was not relatives who provided for children in their parents’ times of famine or hardship but the cold machinery of the state and international organizations. This liberal narrative advanced by the United Nations infringed upon the sovereignty of African states and most importantly African parents. In this struggle to maintain control


659 Briggs, 40-63.
over its own youth and children, the ability to implement and enforce legislation served as a litmus test for imperialist intervention.

7.8 ‘Failed parents, Failed States’: Legislation and the making of ‘FGM’ in Africa

At a United Nations Human Development Conference held in Vancouver in 1976, Fran Hosken, a vocal United States activist against female circumcision in Africa, questioned the Chief Delegate from Somalia, Dr. A. J. Abdille, on the practice she saw as the ‘mutilation’ of children. Confronting him with the “facts” of the issue, he responded that both his wife and daughters had been infibulated and that hospitals were now providing a “better way” to perform the procedure. Disgusted with what she saw as the Somali delegate’s neglect of his own daughters, Hosken’s later quipped, “So much for the new Revolutionary Government of Moslem Democratic Republic of Somalia.”

This derisive critique of the African nation-state in 1976 reflected the belief that post-independence African states had failed in their roles as trustees. The failure of the state as trustee was illustrated through Robert Bates’ 1980s characterization of the post-independence African state as a ‘failed state.’ The failed state, while enacting laws, could not enforce them, and instead acted ‘parasitically’ in its exploitation of its peoples labour and resources. The belief that African states were parasitic and had squandered the time granted to them in independence was evident in this Batesian approach as well as in

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the rhetoric of international activists such as Fran Hosken. Writing about what she felt was the state’s slow progress in tackling undesirable customs, Hosken’s lamented, “…yet to date when most African countries are well into the second decade of their independence and are reaching maturity, no one has had the courage or the conviction to say the truth about genital mutilation. Therefore it continues.”662 Certainly, the sense was that in two decades following the disruptive, exploitative experiment that was colonialism, African states should have modernized, developed, and abolished all backward customs deemed repugnant to the international community. Despite the commitments of post-independence governments to ‘crash-campaigns’ the Ghanaian state had not proved it was a responsible trustee. Rather than colonialism being the brief, disruptive moment for Africans in their history of their continent, European trusteeship was somehow seen as a natural order from which the African nation-state had departed – and failed.663

Like the UN, SCF, and their predecessors Hosken placed the child squarely at the centre of the failed, African state. However, in the case of FGM, this failed state thesis of the 1980s combined with interest in women and children to further signify the female child as the terrain on which the battle for trusteeship would be fought – and won. Not only was the government failing women by condoning the practice lamented Hosken, but it was failing its children. She stated, "It is a farce to talk about development as long as


nothing is done to prevent the deliberate mutilation of children for no other reason than that they are female.” Here, it was not only children who were considered symbolic of Africa’s future, but more specifically female children. Using the language of ‘future mothers’ that had been invoked earlier in the 1960s by the Tamale based Committee Against Undesirable Customs, Hosken wrote:

The girls who are mutilated today – and these operations go unchecked and continue everywhere – are the future mothers of each nation. How can women who are deliberately mutilated and crippled physically and psychologically fulfill the multiple responsibilities of a new and very different kind of life? How can a nation develop if the potential of up to half its population is kept in dependence, mutilated and in servitude as pawns of fertility to fulfill the aspirations of men? The first need and requirement of every human being is health. Without this human right to a sound body and mind, without control over her own genitalia and her own reproductive function the development of a woman as well as the development of a country is bound to fail: because the futures are inexorably linked…

In this excerpt, Hosken linked the development of the African state with the development of the woman in a way that infers African states had not already made this connection. Although in its crash campaigns the Ghanaian state had embraced the modern family, invoked tropes of the unfit parent, and signed international agreements such as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, its hesitancy to introduce national legislation against prostitution, nudity, and other customs appeared contradictory, especially in the eyes of the international community.

664 Ibid.
665 Ibid.
In independent Ghana, it was not that legislation was not proposed or even debated concerning customs affecting women and children, but the state did not want to implement laws that would have to be policed and enforced through fines. Rather than introduce legislation, successive governments maintained focus on education and expediency, choosing to exercise bureaucratic frugality by re-launching pre-existing campaigns. In 1972, for example, the Social Welfare and Community Development office in Tamale argued for the re-activation of anti-nudity campaigns in the region, telling Accra that it was worthwhile since “the incidence of such practice (sic) as tribal markings, lip piercing and nudity still persist notwithstanding our past efforts towards their eradication.”

Invoking the idea that this was once and for all, Tamale argued that since the progress of past governments had been slow, “the need for an “all-out crash programme…would not be premature.” Again, the focus here was to be on sharp intensive campaigns rather than long, drawn out operations. Clearly, it was not expediency that was thought premature, but rather legislation. As one official explained at an anti-nudity rally, earlier in 1969:

Some people have advocated that we should make laws to force those who go nude to clothe themselves and that any women found in the nude should be prosecuted. While it may be easy to make the law and enforce it, we do not think this shows that we are mature and reasonable, so we would prefer to advise and persuade you to this of your free will to forcing you, but if persuasion fails, then we may

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666 David, Ahadu Iddisah, Lt. Col. Regional Commissioner, Tamale to Sec. To the N.R. C. Office of the N.R.C. Accra, 16th Nov. 1972, Nudity, Tribal Markings and Other Ceremonial Practices in the Northern Region, NAGT 8/2/216

667 Ibid.
have no alternative but to use force. I am sure you will not like us to use force, so change voluntarily.  

Clearly, legislation would be a last resort even after the use of force. What is more interesting is that the government did not think legislation indicated maturity or reason. While this is in direct contrast to the international community, which held up legislation as the indicator of a fully functioning and sovereign nation-state, it did reflect a degree of continuity toward undesirable customs in Northern Ghana. As in the examples of female circumcision, pawnning, and nudity, the colonial government was not eager to legislate against customs tied to women, gender, and the family unit. In particular, in areas such as Northern Ghana where the experiment of indirect rule led officials to condone practices such as female circumcision in an effort to maintain native customs and social cohesion, legislation was repeatedly rejected. As demonstrated in the case of Rattray, suggestions from colonial anthropologists encouraging legislation were not only unwelcome but vilified as naïve. While post-independence governments certainly had the jurisdiction to legislate against customs considered ‘backward’ and ‘un-Ghanaian,’ independent Ghana chose education rather than legal prosecution. Far from mindlessly carrying on a colonial script, this hesitation toward implementing legislation resulted from a belief that undesirable practices were confined to the borderlands.

Of course, the struggle over trusteeship of children and youth was about sovereignty. Here, the sovereignty of the nation-state was defined by borders constructed during the late-nineteenth century European Scramble. Colonial officials in the north-east

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668 Address by Lt. Col. Amadu Issidah, Northern Regional Committee of Admin at a Rally at Nakpala. On 26th Feb. 1969, Nudity, Tribal Markings and Other Ceremonial Practices in the Northern Region, NAGT 8/2/216
had long blamed the fluidity of its northern borders and especially so-called ‘foreigners’ as acting as vehicles for customs such as nudity and female circumcision. This pattern continued with prostitution as well. Complaining of the prevalence of venereal disease among policemen and teachers in Kusasi District in 1965, the Senior Medical Officer Dr. Ghosh noted that he was unsure whether any action could be taken against prostitutes to ensure the health and safety in the District. Emphasizing that it was the women’s mobility across the borderlands that frustrated their efforts, Ghosh lamented that in the district of Kusasi, it would be difficult if not impossible to identify prostitutes in ‘town’ because “they go from place to place like hawks.” While a similar pattern of foreigner rhetoric emerged concerning undesirable customs post-independence, the crucial difference was that now rather than subjects, Ghanaians were citizens. Although the Tamale Committee had made many proposals geared to undercut if not completely override existing legislation (nighttime raids, prosecution of supposed prostitutes, curfews), it did not try to tackle the lack of legislation; the rhetoric of citizenship was enough, combined with the explanation that “the unfortunate girls who have fallen victim to these social evils are not aliens but our own daughters.”

Despite the porous border, the rhetoric of citizenship was predicated upon arguing that prostitution affected Ghanaian daughters and not ‘foreigners’. More importantly however, it demonstrates how

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669 NAGT 9/10/9 Bawku Hospital, “Bawku Hospital Advisory Board Minutes of the Meeting Held at Bawku on 18th February, 1965. Those in attendance included: Dr. A.K. Ghosh, Senior Medical Officer, Bolgatanga; Rev. E. Peyer, Secretary Medical Work, Presby. Church; Dr. EC. Lutz, Medical Officer in charge, Bawku Hospital; Mr. Owusu-Sekyere, Clerk of Council, Bawku; Mr. E.A. Assibi, Local Court Magistrate, Bawku. It is notable that the only woman in attendance while discussing the women prostitutes who moved about like ‘hawks’ was Sister Irene Stuebler, listed as ‘Sister Tutor’.

670 “An Outline of a Crash Campaign Against Prostitution,” Regional Committee for Social Education Progress Campaign Against Undesirable Social Practices, NAGT 8/5/308
inclusion and exclusion, when applied to undesirable customs, can be used to absolve the nation-state from taking legislative action demanded by international organizations intent on holding so-called ‘failed’ African states under a microscope.

The terms used to describe undesirable practices in modern Ghana such as ‘un-Ghanaian’, ‘foreign’, and ‘underground’ are really terms of exclusion. These terms of exclusion necessarily force us to address the inverse – ‘inclusion’ – and ask the important question of ‘who’ is being included in the nation-state’s development. Just as it did with indirect rule in the colonial era, the idea of ‘community’ came to the fore. Could it be that this long history of trying to build ‘community’ in Northern Ghana gave rise to these expressions of exclusion? Or is it simply a natural reaction against international organizations, pressing the nation to live up to international standards set out to ensure imperialistic intervention. If we take colonialism as a tangible process of alterity – or a carrot and stick dialectic of inclusion and exclusion through the provision or appropriation of resources (whether they be land, labour, or minerals) – then we are left with a process by which any number of outcomes could arise. As James Ferguson has noted in *Expectations of Modernity*, attempts at modernity via development have often led to disastrous repercussions, with many left to navigate the rough slope of these failed expectations alone.⁶⁷¹ Colonial attempts at community building, facilitated through partition and the imposition of indirect rule structures, often hinged on inclusion and exclusion. For post-independence governments the pressure from international watchdogs to abolish undesirable practices only led to a string of failed expectations and the

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impression that it was African ‘failed-states’ not European colonialism and neo-colonialism, that was to blame.

7.9 Conclusion

The Northern Territories was viewed by colonial administrators as a pristine, untouched, primitive child in need of trusteeship. Far from abandoned in post-independence Ghana, this narrative of the child and trustee extended to the state’s development schemes in the North, particularly regarding undesirable practices as they affected children and youth. Following Nkrumah’s rule, this trusteeship translated into a preoccupation with prostitution (the social evil that has arrived with urbanization) and “orphaned” children (and the need to protect orphaned Northern children from such corruption).

On one hand, the focus on children and youth in late 1960s and early 1970s Ghana can be understood as a response to the change in age-relations that urbanization had brought about. That this shift coincided with the prevailing ‘modernization’ discourse of the time ensured that the state asserted its trusteeship over African parents, who were increasingly viewed as incapable of controlling and protecting their children from the ravages of modernity. The sense that prostitution and a general perception of ‘lewdness’ continued to plague young, educated or working women in this Northern capital demonstrated the lingering effects of colonial policies concerning women and children in Northern Ghana. In launching crash-campaigns with a focus on immediate results, post-coup governments struggled to eradicate undesirable practices in short time. On the other hand, as political instabilities marred the state’s capacity to launch effective, long-term solutions, international organizations increased their activities on African women and
children, particularly female children. In the face of propagandic images of the child, and without enforceable legislation, newly independent nation-states become caught in a tenuous battle for trusteeship over their own people and problems.

Increasingly, those with time, money, and the means of international influence such as Fran Hosken ‘discovered’ undesirable customs in Africa and turned them into modern-day crusades. With the introduction of devastating structural adjustment policies in the 1980s and the labelling of African countries as ‘unfit’ trustees of their own people, the post-independence state became the ‘failed-state.’ Introduced by colonial actors and hardened from post-independence nationalist rhetoric, Ghana’s northern borders took on dimensions that obscured the fluidity and dynamism of their longer regional and local histories. The sad result was that under constant pressure from international groups, practices – even those considered at home and abroad as ‘undesirable’ – were increasingly defined by the state in terms of exclusion, as ‘un-Ghanaian.’
Chapter 8

Conclusion

Undesirable Practices and Development in Africa:

Averting the Male Gaze

In 1975, Laura Mulvey’s essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” argued that the act of looking was in itself an exercise of power. Mulvey drew her formulation of the male gaze from selections of Althusserian concerns with ideology and Jacque Lacan’s structural linguistic analysis of Freud. Patriarchy is central to the male gaze – that is, in Mulvey’s terms, the outfitting of the visual (in this case, cinema) to suit male pleasure and desires. A cornerstone of feminist film theory, Mulvey’s critique of how the male gaze is guided by desires is similarly applicable to the male authored colonial archive. In many ways, this thesis has drawn on Mulvey’s original contribution to discuss how not only gender, but also race, ethnicity, and the nation-state impacts the act of looking in colonial contexts. Undesirable practices of female circumcision, pawning, nudity, prostitution, and illicit adoption were targets of the male gaze in colonial and post-independence Africa. However, as my thesis has demonstrated, discursive engagement with these issues did not materialize into definitive legislative intervention by the state. In all cases, legislation was viewed as precipitous, ineffective, or difficult to


674 Ibid.
uphold. Several factors influenced this attitude toward legislation, but most important was that of development doctrine.

Anne Phillip’s study has demonstrated the uniqueness of colonial policy in British West Africa. She does not argue that the region was isolated from concerns that influenced policy in other areas of Africa (detribalization, ‘gender chaos,’ urbanization and generalized unrest), but that the West Africa Policy shaped how most “native” concerns were managed. Following WWI, officials in West Africa worked to pre-empt many of the problems they saw occurring in east and southern Africa. The movement to pre-empt was rooted in an overall aim of re-setting the clock to a pre-Atlantic slave trade and a vision of a communal, peasant-oriented West Africa. This perception was that Africans were necessarily communal and that individualism and capitalism were foreign to the African mind. Western education, capital accumulation and individualism had already reached coastal cities of West Africa and officials aimed to block the perceived detribalization brought about by these influences. In order to block detribalization from spreading through the interior, officials had to study, invent, and shape traditions and ‘traditional’ practices tied to tribe and community.

Following WWI and into the 1940s, a colonial policy of indirect rule came to dominate development policy in Northern Ghana. The institution and reform of native administration made the question of tradition and native custom particularly sensitive. Perceived as natural to agrarian development doctrine, community fit with officials’ beliefs of a peasant-oriented West Africa.675 Civil society was based upon individual rights and it was believed by officials that individualization was anathema to Africans;

community was believed to be a buffer to the development of civil society long underway in southern Ghana. Most importantly, individual rights fostered nationalist sentiments, expressed through strikes, boycotts and general unrest or backlash against colonial policies. In short, individual rights and capitalistic, individualistic thinking was to be discouraged in Northern Ghana. Restrictions on some missionary expansion in the North and stifling of most female education through the 1930s demonstrated this commitment to blocking the development of civil society. Though, and this must be made clear, these efforts did not entirely block the development of civil society. The process of indirect rule certainly encouraged decentralized despotism, but it was not as hegemonic as Mamdani famously claimed. Tensions did arise and these tensions played out in various ways and through various issues related to land, labour and resources.

Undesirable practices were tied to land, labour and resources in north-eastern Ghana. The north-east was a geographical space defined through, as Nugent and Asiwaju have shown, Africans’ everyday transgression of European-imposed borders. Undesirable practices were also about labour as the sexual division of labour combined with male out-migration to impact women’s work. In times of hardship, wealth was often only found in people. During these times, and as Klein and Roberts have shown, children and

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676 Grischow, *Shaping Tradition*.

677 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*. See also: Jeff Grischow, *Shaping Tradition* and Sara Berry, *No Condition is Permanent: the Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in sub-Saharan Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993). I generally agree with Berry’s argument that indirect rule worked to establish a terrain of struggle. However, influenced by a long-ago conversation with Kojo Amanor, I have come to believe that though Mamdani’s decentralized despotism was not hegemonic, there was more of an opposition between civil society and community, individual rights and the group, than Berry’s formulation suggests. I do not meant to strip north-easterners of agency, but rather to re-assert focus on the oppressive aspects and legacies of indirect rule.
particularly female children became more susceptible to pawning.\textsuperscript{678} Having found themselves in the hands of creditors, many girls from French West Africa labored locally, in Bawku, or long-distance, on farms in southern Ghana. Officials’ unwillingness to consider these forms of dependency as ‘slavery’ highlights the messy business of enforcing slavery legislation involving women— even in 1940s Ghana. Moreover, the attempt by the pawned girl, Kibadu alias Ama, to resist redemption and remain with the man whom she called her husband, Kwaku, is a judicial example of the limits imposed on women’s voices. Kibadu sought to exercise individual rights for freedom of mobility and decision-making concerning her own labour and sexuality. The Magistrate’s effective blocking of her stated desire was as much about defending lineage structures and tribal community in the West African interior as it was about controlling women; the two cannot be disentangled.

The tension between community and individual rights was also about controlling women in colonial and post-colonial Northern Ghana. My thesis has sought to shed light on the reasons behind the gendering of undesirable practices. Why, for example, was female circumcision an issue but not male circumcision; female nudity but not male nudity? As I have demonstrated, the concern for female circumcision began with the Parliamentary inquiries of Atholl, Rathbone and Wedgwood. Rather than following this gaze to the ends of intervention and legislative prohibition, officials employed strategies of aversion. In the West African department responses, Governors framed female circumcision and female-led initiation societies as integral to African society and made

\textsuperscript{678} Klein and Roberts. “The Resurgence of Pawning in French West Africa During the Depression of the 1930s,” 422-422.
the case that interference in these practices would lead to riots similar to the 1929 Aba Women’s War. This was not simply a question of gender. Rather, it was also a question of age. Initiation societies maintained both age and gender relations for both male and females; entry into ‘adulthood’ was negotiated through these societies. Uninitiated females were considered children, despite their age, while those who were initiated were welcomed into society as adults. In marking adulthood, initiation was also a public display of the girl’s readiness for marriage and womanhood (often predicated upon motherhood). Thus, for administrators concerned with upholding production and reproduction in West Africa, age-relations and initiation was highly significant.

The significance of initiation explains why officials in Northern Ghana sought to encourage the ‘Wala’ form of circumcision in infancy. Here, the milder form of circumcision was not only determined by the extent of cutting (as in Sudan) but also by the age of cutting. In refusing to enact legislation, officials attempted to persuade north-easterners to adopt the less harmful, Wala form of cutting infant children. In framing the ideal form along tribal lines, officials demonstrated the relationship between initiation, age-relations, and indirect rule. Concern for cutting was not a question of individual harm – as Rattray believed – but rather about the rights and cohesion of the tribal group. Legislative intervention meant not only risking the backlash of troublesome ‘decentralized’ tribes along the north-eastern borderland, but also the destruction of gerontocratic relations upon which indirect rule relied.

The conflict between individual and community was demonstrated through Rattray’s disagreement with officials regarding female circumcision. In my chapter on Rattray, I have demonstrated what postcolonial scholars have argued about the male gaze
in colonial contexts: it is neither homogenous nor monolithic. Rather, it is splintered into categories of ‘colonial gaze’ and ‘ethnographic gaze.’ Rattray’s gaze was ethnographic. The information he collected was aimed at reforming native administration in the North. However, though colonial officials and Rattray shared the vision of reforming indirect rule in the North, they differed over how this was best achieved. Their disagreement concerning the legislation of female circumcision parallels their disagreement concerning earth-priests. Rattray’s disagreement with administrators on the subject of earth-priests has been discussed by every major historian working on the North. However, the similarly divisive subject of female circumcision has until now been neglected. In discussing female circumcision alongside earth-priests, I have demonstrated the relative importance of initiation to indirect rule and the reformation of native administration along chiefly lines. Rattray’s eyewitness account positioned female circumcision as a matter of individual rights. In framing his research this way, his stance reflected a commitment to the individual, over and above the tribe. Paradoxically, the male colonial gaze in Northern Ghana was set on community defined along tribal lines, while Rattray’s ethnographic gaze focused on the detribalized individual and civil society.

This thesis has argued that indirect rule tribalized undesirable practices and that this process of tribalization was heightened along the north-eastern borderlands. Autochthony and ‘belonging’ came to be expressed through ethnicity and tribal identification, but also in the post-independence years, through the performance of

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undesirable practices by strangers or ‘foreigners.’ I have shown how colonial officials attempted to co-opt and create chiefs in their reformation of indirect rule. These interventions into local political structures in the north-east provided space for groups to dispute autochthony and rights over land and political governance. The elevation of Mamprusi decreased the power of other indigenous positions of power, such as earth-priests and magazias (women leaders) and created tensions between Mamprusi and Kusasi in the north-east. The link between indirect rule structures and ethnic tensions has been discussed by Benjamin Talton of the Konkomba and Dagboma in Yendi as well as Carola Lentz and Sean Hawkins in the north-west. My thesis has demonstrated how female circumcision became a point of tension between colonial officials, Mamprusi chieftaincy, and Busanga and Yanga ‘foreigner’ groups.

The theme of autochthony and belonging was also highlighted in the *Kwaku Anin vs. C.O.P* case. Here, thorny questions of slavery and women’s status intersect and the gendering of the pawns dovetailed with their categorization as children to depict them in the male judicial gaze as helpless victims in need of redemption. Overarching perceptions of female slaves as something less than ‘slave’ precluded a ruling of ‘slavery’ — without inverted commas. This was despite questions centering on the girls’ ethnicity constructed by their tribal markings, linguistic competency, and ties to Busanga parents and kin. The Magistrate’s choice to classify the girls as something less than slaves demonstrates the selectivity of the male colonial-judicial gaze; to admit slavery would be recognition of the colonial states’ failure to stop slavery, which was a precondition for colonial trusteeship. Furthermore, Amory’s desire to redeem the girls to their Busanga lineage structure despite the protests of one of the girls, Kibadu alias Ama, illustrates the limits of
women’s agency in colonial courts as well as the dynamic relationship between the performative and the discursive in colonial litigation.

Just as development policy altered little with the coming of independence nor did the male gaze. Nkrumah’s rhetoric of abolishing undesirable practices was expressly interventionist. However, this rhetoric was more about nation-building and only served so far as it worked to buttress the state’s broader developmental aims. Anti-nudity campaigns were centralized and supported by the state not only to increase efficiency but also to ensure these efforts were more strictly managed. In other words, to ensure the campaigns were of ‘no publicity.’ Moreover, the problems of nudity and scarification were approached using tools the state was already using to increase wage-earning, productivity and consumption in Ghana. Nkrumah’s Builder’s Brigades is a perfect example of this. Though the Northern Regional Commissioner preferred a ‘self-help’ approach, Nkrumah saw an opportunity to tackle the nudity problem as well as expand his Brigades. As in colonial times, propaganda and persuasion was preferred over legislation. Though local by-laws were passed and viewed as effective at controlling public spaces and the women who frequented these spaces, all-out legislation was shelved. Overall, the issue of nudity was seconded to the larger, more important issue of building a productive, CPP-loyal Northern citizenry.

The gaze of the post-independence state toward children and youth in the late 1960s and early 1970s was about urbanization and the change in gender and age-relations that this urbanization brought about. The sense that prostitution and a general perception of ‘lewdness’ continued to plague young, educated or working woman in this Northern capital demonstrated the lingering effects of late colonial policies concerning women and
children in Northern Ghana. The immediacy of crash-campaigns was about the state’s failures to make up for these lingering effects in short time. On the other hand, as political instabilities marred the state’s capacity to launch effective, long-term solutions, international organizations increased their activities on African women and children, particularly female children. In the face of propaganda, images of the child, and lacking enforceable legislation, post-coup Ghana became caught in a losing battle for trusteeship over their its people and problems.

Rather than focus on how colonial policy was shaped by the male gaze, I have discussed how colonial policy in Northern Ghana demanded an aversion of this gaze. Here, my concern has been about the act of ‘looking away’ as an exercise of power. I do not argue that the male colonial gaze was completely averted from the issues of female circumcision, pawnng, nudity, prostitution and adoption. Clearly, this thesis was made possible by the sheer amount of discussion and debate over these practices in the colonial and post-colonial archives. However, I do contend that this aversion was shaped by colonial development policy. The male colonial gaze was selective and averted from addressing these issues within the parameters of female individual rights and civil society. It rather focused on handling these issues in a gradualist manner and within colonial perceived rights of the tribe and community. In all cases – female circumcision, pawnng, nudity, prostitution and illicit adoption – legislation marked the limits of the male colonial gaze. Legislation promoted individualism and the rights of the individual over the rights of the tribe; legislation against practices associated with women promoted individualism and transgressions of gender and age-relations. This thesis has argued that the power was not in the gaze, but in the considerably more difficult act of looking away.
Anne Phillips’ “path of least resistance” was one of aversion and the act of ‘looking away’ was in itself a precise exercise of power aimed at the maintenance of tribal community and the control of women and children’s movement, sexuality, and labour in colonial and post-colonial Northern Ghana.
Figure 10 - Proverbs about women are commonly displayed on the front and back of vehicles in West Africa. The phrase ‘Fear Woman’ was also seen by this author on another vehicle in Yendi, Northern Region, in 2008. The inclusion of ‘Hmm’ below implies gender and gender relations as terrains of struggle in Northern Ghana.

Source: Jessica Cammaert, Tamale, Northern Region, Ghana, 2008.
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