WEST AFRICAN LABOUR AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MECHANISED MINING IN SOUTHWEST GHANA, C. 1870s TO 1910

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Oxford

Trinity Term, 2013

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Short Abstract

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Wassa in southwest Ghana was the location of the largest mining sector in colonial British West Africa. The gold mines provide an excellent case study of how labour was mobilised for large-scale production immediately after the legal end of slavery, in the context of an expansive independent labour market. Divided into three sections, this thesis examines the practice of indirect labour recruitment for the mines during the formative years of colonial rule; the incorporation of 'traditional' credit relationships into 'modern' commerce. The starting point for this study is the analysis of precolonial strategies for mobilising labour. Part one examines the most pervasive and coercive employer-employee relationship in precolonial West Africa, namely the master-slave relationship. Even enslaved Africans could expect individual economic opportunity, and related to such, debt protection, and the power of labourers increased significantly after abolition. Starting in the 1870s, mine management found that the most effective way of recruiting long-term wage earners was through headmen; African authorities who established temporary patronage relationships with a group of labourers by offering them credit. Moreover, administrative and court records indicate that there were various forms of headship, some which the mines managed to impose greater regulation over than others. Therefore, part two demonstrates that issues of cost and control of recruitment differed depending on whether the labour recruiter had been furnished with the capital of a mining firm to conduct his business, whether he had done so with his own personal savings, or whether he was in the employment of the colonial government. Finally, part three takes a comparative look at headship and recruitment through rural chiefs, which began in 1906; two successive forms of non-free wage labour mobilisation. In 1909, mine management reverted to the headship system that many colonial commentators regarded as being more compatible with the colonial political order, albeit under considerably stricter regulations.

Long Abstract

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This D.Phil thesis traces the practice of indirect labour recruitment for the mechanised mines in southwest Ghana during the formative years of colonial rule.

The constitution of African 'invented traditions' in colonial Africa has confounded historians since the 1980s. In West African labour history, scholars have predominantly looked at a particular 'traditional' authority, namely the African chief, who abetted the recruitment efforts of the private sector and government by supplementing colonial market forces. At the same time, they have recognised that a chief's power mostly stemmed from indigenous precolonial institutions. For the most part scholars have explained the chief's authority to organize labour in cultural terms, i.e. political power and social pressure. Less attention has been paid to the economic negotiations that marked the relationships between African intermediaries and their recruits. Arguably, the omission of the economic dynamics of indigenous labour

mobilisation and their ties to precolonial institutions, in favour of a rhetoric of culture and politics, only reifies a colonial image of African workers as submissive tribal subjects. By analysing the monetary relations that formed the basis of colonial indirect recruitment, the nature and dynamics of labour mobilisation for West Africa's 'modern' commercial sector during the formative years of colonial rule will be reassessed.

In contrast to labour historians who rely on cultural explanations such as 'political labour' or 'forced labour' to cover a variety of negotiations between African intermediaries and their recruits, this study endeavours to analyse indirect recruitment for the mines in an economic and social context. Therefore, its approach is located in the field of economic history, but employing both sociological and anthropological perspectives. To this purpose, exploring material relations will be crucial, however, by taking up the outlook of 'hybrid-marxist' labour history, which has been advocated by scholars such as Marcel van der Linden, this study examines the expansion of the colonial wage labour market without employing the crude theoretical frameworks inherent in the more dogmatic 'marxist' literature, especially proletarianisation theory.

The period from the 1870s to 1905 begins with the Scramble for Africa and European claims to African territory, and in Ghana ends with territorial expansion into its interior. The scope of this study comprises the era of imperial expansion, when the various polities and kingdoms that make up modern Ghana were being consolidated as either part of the colony or part of one of its protectorates. Scholars of colonial history would certainly count this as the formative years of colonial rule. The state was in the process of centralising; yet, it was just beginning to establish a physical presence on the ground beyond the perimeters of the colony proper. Even though European power was increasing incrementally, the provincial administration during this period was marginal to the colonial state. Therefore, in colonial administration, as well as in colonial commerce, African intermediaries facilitated the organisation of African working populations.

Some historians have suggested that there were fundamental breaks in economic and social relationships once slavery was abolished in parts of West Africa. They consider the legal end of slavery as having a revolutionary impact on the local social structure. Nevertheless, there is evidence to argue that the British still needed African authorities to contribute to the post-proclamation colonial economy, and not always on the terms that the British had set. This was, for example, the case with large-scale labour recruitment. Thus far, little attention has been paid to the multiple, distinctive manners in which African recruiters collaborated with foreign employers in the mechanised gold mines of Wassa. Therefore, coexisting systems of indirect recruitment will be explored.

It will also be important to give special attention to the relationship between African intermediaries and the men they recruited to serve in the mines. Their relationship was mediated by monetary relations; a marker of socioeconomic inequality. Nevertheless, unequal economic and social status does not necessarily imply oppression. Headship was not slavery. The legal end of slavery may not have been revolutionary. Yet, it provided new and increasing choices to African workers. This study will question how African workers were able to negotiate this new urban economic terrain in spite of most of them remaining in some form of relationship of dependency with an African patron; how they showed agency and gained wealth under continued structural constraints.

In the course of five chapters, this thesis traces the expansion of the wage labour market by means of indirect recruitment during and immediately after the final years of territorial expansion in colonial Ghana, enquiring how African workers were mobilised other than through social pressure and taxation, and to what extent the authority of African recruiters depended on the endorsement of European employers. In this way, it aims to show continuities and positive interactions between 'traditional' precolonial institutions and the 'modern' colonial economy. In order to examine the complex negotiations between these different actors that shaped the expansion of a wage labour market, the analysis is divided in three parts.

The first of these sets the stage by illustrating that there was an economic, as well as a social, element to mobilising labour in nineteenth century West Africa. In order to exploit the labour of a slave in the long-term, Akan slaveholders, for example, had to offer certain basic goods, as well as guarantees in opportunity and welfare. Debt protection and the provision of credit were only some of the inducements that would keep a slave from running away and finding a new patron.

The second part deals with the subsumption of 'traditional' patronage relationships into 'modern' commerce for the purpose of bringing men to the mines and stabilising the labour force during the first and second gold boom in southwest Ghana. As revealed through administrative reports from the first commissioner to Tarkwa district, local labourers in the central Akan region were reluctant to work in an extended and disciplined manner. Chapter 2 therefore demonstrates that during the first gold boom in Wassa 1879 to 1885 mine management relied on labourer recruiters from Liberia to supply them with contract men. These Kru, Grebo and Basa headmen, who in general already had a longstanding history of earning wages under foreign employers in other parts of West Africa, brought in men from within their own social group. They disciplined, trained, and ensured the welfare of their recruits during their term of service. This group was further unique in their reliance on the authorisation and/or capital of mine management to conduct their recruitment activities. The term 'career headmen' distinguishes this type of labour recruiter throughout the thesis. Chapter 3 indicates that in light of a failed petition to the colonial authorities for a recruitment monopoly, collaboration between managers and 'career headmen' continued to be the preferred method of enlisting men. However, during the second gold boom in Wassa of 1900 to 1905, the cost of recruiting from Liberia became too high and managers were forced to engage recruiters from other parts of Africa to meet part of this sudden labour shortfall. In chapter 4, drawing from the private papers of the Chief Officer of the Government Transport Department Frederick William Hugh Migeod, it is illustrated that the Colonial Office was willing to offer some assistance to the mines in this matter. The Government Transport Department contracted gangs of labourers to the mines by institutionalising and imposing additional regulation onto the headship system, though in the long run Migeod intended to introduce pass laws and individual registration as a solution to gaining control of the labour market and lowering the cost of labour. Through court records from the Tarkwa District Criminal and Civil Court, chapter 5 illuminates the role of independent labour recruiters, usually indigenous petty traders, in meeting a part of the shortfall of contract labourers during the period of cocoa boom in Ghana. However, because these intermediaries added additional competition, insecurity, and abuse into the market, mine managers only worked with them with considerable hesitation.

The third part covers what at first appears to be the fading out of the headship system in favour of indirect recruitment through African chiefs. District records from the Northern Territories reveal that this fundamental shift was contingent upon British penetration into labour-dense pockets of this region following the final war against the Asante kingdom. As chapter 6 explains however, 'political labour' was a short-lived means of getting contract labour, since its effects posed a threat to the stability of the indirect rule system that the colonial authorities were eager to protect. Employers in Wassa reverted to allying with headmen after 1909, but in a much more tightly regulated fashion than before. A comparison of these two forms of indirect recruitment helps to expand the discussion on colonial non-free wage labour through African intermediaries.

There were few documents that allow a reconstruction of labour recruitment strategies in Wassa, and what is available requires piecing together from a number of archives predominantly in the United Kingdom and Ghana. For the chapter 1, detailing observations of the indigenous slave system, various published travel accounts and commentaries on contemporary current affairs were utilized. The detailed administrative reports with surveys of the individual mines, their employees and various manners of employment in Tarkwa used for chapter 2 of the thesis were rare, however, some of these documents have survived; whereas records of the various mining companies, most of which were only in use for a handful of years, were very difficult to recover. Records of liquidated mining firms from nineteenth century Wassa that are held at the National Archives at Kew made little mention of African labour beyond discerning the sum of expenses passed onto them on a monthly or annual basis. In this respect, the brief, yet, intricate report by Commissioner Cuscaden presents a unique insight into the mines' diverse approaches to hiring African workers. In combination with census records, it became possible to discern the composition of the labour force in terms of ethnicity, and even more importantly, in terms of controlled versus independent labour. The indirect recruitment of Liberian contract men, predominantly under master and servant contracts, stood out as the most ‘steady’ and desirable form of employment in the nineteenth century mines. Although the number of Liberian recruits entering colonial Ghana sharply fell by 1902, in chapter 3 the Tarkwa District Criminal and Civil Court records are used to show that African intermediaries continued to feature prominently in the recruitment process.

In addition, the private papers of Migeod, that form the basis for the analysis provided in chapter 4, reveal how the Colonial Office came to the assistance of the Wassa mines to recruit. As Chief Officer of the Government Transport Department, which hired out groups of men to mining companies, Migeod himself relied on the mobilisation and management of African workers through other Africans. An analysis of government assistance to the mines shows that Migeod’s attempt to side with the Mine Managers’ Association in gaining further control over African workers in the mines was sidelined by officials in Accra who had other priorities for the colony. The failure to pass the Concessions Labour Bill in 1903, which among other stipulations prescribed the individual registration of labourers, underscored rifts within the administration on the subject of economic development.

Court records also provided a voice for the African workers and recruiters who are at the centre of this study, but who are also silent in most of the primary sources consulted. Court documents were especially useful when it came to reconstructing the social structure of headship, the dynamics of dependences that existed between Africans after legal emancipation. In particular, it was through legal documents that a clear distinction arose between the 'career headmen', who used the capital of particular mining firms registered abroad to advance labourers, and the 'independent headmen', who financed recruitment through their personal savings, as discussed in chapter 5. At the same time, given that most labour disputes would have been settled — one way or the other — outside the courts it becomes important to assess these cases as not necessarily representative of everyday struggles inside the mining villages.

In common with other parts of West Africa, intervention by the colonial state in matters of recruitment and control of African labourers for the private sector only becomes far-reaching once the political administration has time to grow in the interior regions. In Ghana this was the case with the Northern Territories. After 1903, the Government Transport Department only provided a few hundred men for hire to mining companies per year. District records from this area, featuring prominently in chapter 6, demonstrate that by 1906 political officials began to recruit large groups of men through local chiefs in the North. Headmen appear to have become almost redundant. Yet, after the failure of 'political labour', administrators reverted to the headship system, though in a highly regulated manner. Mine management's reliance on headmen, as was often the case between Europeans and their African intermediaries in a colonial context, was necessary, but fraught with tension, as the duties set out for these individuals by their European employers did not always complement ambitions outside the workplace.

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I finally want to thank my family and my husband for their unwavering support, and my daughter Edith for her patience.

Contents

Abbreviations

CCA	Chief Commissioner Ashanti
CCNT	Chief Commissioner Northern Territories
CS	Colonial Secretary
CUL	Cambridge University Library
UBCWAS	Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham
DC	District Commissioner
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
PRAAD	Ghana National Archives
PRO	British National Archives
PP	Parliamentary Papers
RHO	Rhodes House Library
SNA	Secretary for Native Affairs
SOAS	Archives & Special Collections of the School of African and Oriental Studies
WGCMC	Wassa (Gold Coast) Mining Company

Maps & Illustrations

Introduction

Starting in 1983 prominent historians Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm triggered a generation of scholarship on 'invented traditions' in the colonial situation, i.e. the usage of references to the past to stabilize social and political change. It was especially the notion of 'ethnicity' which many scholars argued was primarily an extension of the colonial policy of 'indirect-rule', or to be more blunt an effect of a particularly divisive 'divide and rule' policy. In accordance with this outlook, an initial group of scholars emphasized the relatively recent 'invention' (and the continuing re-invention) of ethnic identities in colonial Africa. This perspective was however, soon largely abandoned in favour of a theory that was less determinist and one-sided.[1] Instead, new references were made to African agency in the making and transformation of ethnic identities during the colonial era. Where the debate about 'invented traditions' and ethnicity has been further amended is in the recognition that any such analysis would also have to take into account important spatial and temporal differences. While some social groups had no history of ethnicity prior to the colonial era, others certainly did show similar, albeit more fluid, forms of association. Arguably the most important contribution to emerge from the debate about African customs was that whether invented, authentic, or transformed, they were not being conjured up from thin air, but always carried fragments of past customs and practices.[2] In other words, innovative means of social organisation during the

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[1] This debate originates with E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983). See, also Leroy Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989). Criticism include: T. Spear, 'Neo-traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 44 (2003), 3–27.
[2] A. G. Hopkins, 'The New Economic History of Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 50 (2009), 173; John Lonsdale, 'Globalization, Ethnicity and Democracy: a View from "the Hopeless Continent", in A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization World History* (New York, 2002), ch. 9.

colonial period were always related to something very real, something familiar to African people and somehow — though often not intensely — connected to their past.

African Tradition and the Labour History of West Africa

The economic organisation of African populations during the colonial era was also frequently explained using this framework. Starting around the 1980s, the 'invention of tradition' debate began to influence the labour history of Africa. On the one hand, it helped historians come to terms with the manner in which miners organised themselves in colonial mines and why this often occurred along social as opposed to occupational lines. On the other hand, they utilised this concept to see how such allegiances between Africans shaped mine management.

In the South African literature, many labour historians tried to describe what migrant miners experienced as they left their rural homes to settle in the urbanizing mining towns. They were certainly influenced by new rituals, relations, and beliefs. Yet, in all of this novelty many scholars also highlighted that older modes of social organization continued to guide the way in which they organized themselves. For instance, T. D. Moodie argues that migrant gold miners on the Witwatersrand imported into modern enterprise a moral order from home. They constructed 'new life-worlds out of fragments of the old'.[3] Similarly, William Beinart emphasizes that migrant workers in South Africa 'retained deep roots' that continued to influence identity and self-

[3] T. Dunbar Moodie with Vivienne Ndatshe, Going for Gold: Men, Mines, and Migration (Berkeley, CA [etc.], 1994), p. 42; See, also, C. Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1933* (London, 1976).

organization.[4] So, here again we see that even new identifications were connected to something very real, namely older forms of a socio-political order.

In the historiography of labour history in West Africa 'invented traditions' have largely been utilized to grasp labour recruitment strategies through African authorities during the colonial era. Much focus has been on the indirect rule of African chiefs who, supplied government services[5] or the private sector[6] with labourers by putting pressure on his subjects. Nevertheless, the factor of continuity is still a key to understanding authority and organisation in the scholarship on 'political labour'[7] or forced labour, which has loomed large in West African labour history. At the same time, certain elements of the past have tended to overshadow others in the literature.

To find explanations for how African authorities were able to access the labour power of African workers during the formative years of colonial rule[8] most scholars have drawn on cultural history. Most prominently, in Carolyn Brown's work on the Enugu

[4] William Beinart, 'Worker Consciousness, Ethnic Particularism and Nationalism: The Experiences of a South African Migrant, 1930–1960', in Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (eds.), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London, 1990), pp. 286–309, 305.

[5] For studies on the role of 'traditional' African authorities, in particular chiefs, in labour mobilisation for various government services in colonial Ghana, see K. O. Akurang-Parry, 'Colonial Forced Labor Policies for Road-Building in Southern Ghana and International Anti-Forced Labor Pressures, 1900–1940', *African Economic History*, 28 (2000), 1–25; idem, '"The Loads Are Heavier Than Usual": Forced Labor by Women and Children in the Central Province, Gold Coast (Colonial Ghana), *c.* 1900–1940', *African Economic History*, 30 (2002), 31–51; idem, 'African Agency and Cultural Initiatives in the British Imperial Military and Labor Recruitment Drives in the Gold Coast (Colonial Ghana) during the First World War', *African Identities*, 4 (2006), 213–234; David Killingray, 'Labour Mobilization in British Colonial Africa for the War Effort, 1936–46', in David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Africa and the Second World War* (London, 1986), pp. 68–96.

[6] For private sector recruitment through chiefs in colonial West Africa, see, C. A. Brown, *'We Were All Slaves': African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery* (Cape Town, 2003); B. Freund, *Capital and Labour in the Nigerian Tin Mines* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J, 1981); C. Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 138-43; R. G. Thomas, 'Forced Labour in British West Africa: The Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906–1927', *The Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), 79–103.

[7] Also called the 'local method', this system is defined by cooperation between political officials and African chiefs for the purpose of bringing men to industry, often at wage rates that were below-market value.

[8] R. Oliver and G. N. Sanderson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 6: from 1870 to 1905* (Cambridge, 1985).

coal mines in early colonial southern Nigeria she explains the ability of 'invented' chiefs to bring men to industry as facilitated through their relation to the colonial state. Yet, she continues by pointing out that even more important was their ability to fulfil 'Igbo notions of authority'.[9] She explains these Igbo notions of authority in terms of exercising political power. Though she does also mention 'patronage' as being part of the mobilisation procedure between chief and labourers, there is no attempt to explain how this might have been negotiated.[10] Thus, the reader is left with an account of 'coercion' as a most pervasive tool of colonial labour recruitment.

However, references to social power alone arguably run the danger of eliminating evidence of the economic rationality of the African workers involved. The term 'forced labour' in and of itself is used as if self-explanatory, and therefore impedes any further historical inquiry into the motivations, negotiations, and contestations involved in this process. In short, despite wide agreement that precolonial labour in West Africa was an economic, as well as a social phenomenon, many labour historians of West Africa have only been writing social power into the history books. Although the works of Gareth Austin and Polly Hill have gone far to emphasise precolonial economic institutions, as well as modified versions of such during the colonial period in Ghana, researchers have missed important connections between rural and urban pursuits, respectively 'traditional' and 'modern' economic activities which existed during the colonial period. The most comprehensive studies of the labour shortage in the Wassa mines to date pay little attention to the survival of such institutions in the mechanised mines.[11]

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[9] Brown, *'We Were All Slaves'*, p. 58.
[10] Ibid., p. 57.
[11] R. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa: The Gold-Mining Frontier, African Labor, and Colonial Capitalism in the Gold Coast, 1875–1900* (Athens, Ohio, 1998); P. Rosenblum, 'Gold Mining in Ghana

Collaboration Theory and Labour History in West Africa

Intimately connected to research on labour recruitment through African authorities, and more generally the study of African intermediaries in the colonial space, are historiographical debates on 'resistance' and 'collaboration'.[12] Although collaboration theory has never been the dominant narrative in the historiography, it has had a significant and longstanding presence which is continuously developed.[13] More recently growing numbers of historians have pinpointed alliances between Europeans and Africans as laying the foundation for controlling the multitudes in particular during the period of colonial conquest, before more forceful and centralised structures were developed for colonial administration. These African intermediaries 'held positions that bestowed little official authority, but in practice the occupants of these positions functioned, somewhat paradoxically, as the hidden linchpins of colonial rule'.[14] According to Cooper and Burbank, a framework of analysis concerning intermediaries translates as 'the study of people pushing and tugging on relationships with those above and below them, changing but only sometimes breaking the lines of authority'.[15] This notion of 'contested collaboration' in particular provides a more useful and complex view

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1874-1900' (PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 1972). See, also, 'Parallel Mining Frontiers in the Gold Coast and Asante in the late 19th and early 20th century' in Katja Werthmann and Tilo Grätz (eds.), *Mining Frontiers in Africa: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (Köln, 2012).

[12] Channeling E. P. Thompson's celebrated study from 1963, and often inspired by subaltern studies, patterns of working-class formation dominated the literature on 'modern' African workers leading into the 1980s. Some titles that come to mind include, *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action*; *The Formation of an African Working Class in South Africa: Workers' Protest and 'Consciousness'*; *The Making of a West African Working Class*.

[13] For an original text see, Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism', in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, 1972), p. 117-42.

[14] Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn and Richard L. Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison, 2006), p. 4.

of the colonial encounter. Several case studies have already demonstrated the great potential of this approach for a ‘new’ colonial history, such as the collection, *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* edited by Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn and Richard Roberts, which pays special attention to African intermediaries engaged in the colonial administration. Under this revisionist history, not only are concepts of ‘colonial hegemony’ revisited, but the flexible ways in which African intermediaries navigated ambitions that were guided by both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ principles are also considered. The coexistence of such values can of course also be observed in other sectors where Europeans relied on Africans for interpretative, managerial, and related services via a larger African population, such as in the colonial mines. Yet, despite this general reorientation, where African intermediaries have featured in studies on ‘modern’ industry in colonial West Africa, they have been depicted as principally agents of foreign financial interests who facilitated the economic exploitation of other Africans. The narrow discussion of the notions of authority and honour relevant to them has only been matched by the underplaying of ‘struggle factors’ in the balance of power. Power struggles existed both between African intermediaries and African workers, and between African intermediaries and European employers, to refer back to the image conjured by Burbank and Cooper, though granted when looked at broadly the authority of African intermediaries did decrease over the span of the colonial period.

Approach and Scope of Study

The thesis presents an examination of indirect recruitment for the mechanised mines in colonial southwest Ghana during the formative years of colonial rule. Blurring the line between 'precolonial' and 'colonial' era, it studies this practice as a 'modern' phenomenon with roots in precolonial institutions. From the perspective of collaboration theory, it explores the employment relationships in the mines at two levels: between European mine management and African headmen, and between African headmen and the men they recruited to work in the mines. It argues that the expansion of the 'labour mobilisation frontier' of the mechanised mines depended on mine management's incorporation of relationships of dependency between Africans, which had both economic and social aspects.[16] Labour historians of West Africa have focused on the recruitment achievements of African chiefs and the manner in which social pressure and colonial market forces could be used to bring labourers to industry.[17] They have disregarded a rigid conceptual division between precolonial and colonial only to uphold a notion of African workers without agency, who are suspiciously lacking in wants and needs, and who are moreover incapable of taking the necessary action to acquire either. In this study economic rationale, that is business sense, is integral to understanding relations between mine managers and the different types of African labour recruiters they worked with, but also those between African labour recruiters and the young men they recruited.

[16] For the original use of this terms, see R. Dumett, 'Parallel Mining Frontiers'.
[17] See, for example, Brown, *'We Were All Slaves'*.

Free and Unfree Labour

Marcel van der Linden has recently called for the opening up of the field of social history to other parts of the world including Africa and Asia.[18] According to him 'more than half of the world's population has usually been left out' and many 'similarities, differences and interactions between regions and continents were thus obscured.' In the case of labour history, both of the West and the Rest, a longstanding tendency of historians was to only pay attention to the 'free' (male) worker. Other forms of labour, both unfree and independent, were discounted as less relevant to economic development, as were the men and women who moved between these categories. Since the 1990s however, this bias has started to subside. The worker (as well as what constitutes work) is now being conceived outside of this limited, unilinear ideal. Accordingly, this thesis disregards an overreliance on 'classical Marxism' with its emphasis on the 'proletarianisation hypothesis', that posited that 'traditional' pre-capitalist forms of labour organization would inevitably decline under the onslaught of capitalist development. As Gervase Clarence-Smith has observed in reference to the modes of production debate, while the handling of models has stimulated some interesting research questions, it is also essential not be blinded by the dogmatism of such lines of inquiry: 'This in turn provides a channel for the real to re-enter the rational'.[19]

This new global labour history has allowed for a reappearance of Africa in a broader discussion of social and economic development, without diminishing the importance of the local historical context. A shift towards 'hybrid marxism' has in

[18] See, for example M. van der Linden 'The Origins, Spread and Normalization of Free Wage Labour', in Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern, 1997), pp. 501-523.

[19] 'Thou Shalt Not Articulate Modes of Production', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 19 (1985), 19-22.

particular triggered renewed interest among those historians investigating industrial labour relations in Africa through the loosening of theoretical restraints.[20] Within this new scholarship, intermediate forms of labour witnessed in colonial mechanised mines are not assessed as evidence of resistance alone, but also as evidence of collaboration. Related to this method, this thesis makes extensive use of the term 'worker' in reference to contract labourers who usually worked on six- to twelve-month contracts. To be precise, this research upholds differences between the distinction of the 'free' wage labourer, in the classical Marxist sense, and the 'wage labourer', as in someone earning a wage temporarily but not dependent on it for survival. For example, a 'wage labourer' in this sense could also be an 'independent labourer' during other periods of the year. It highlights the expansion of the wage labour market in southwest Ghana by way of voluntary (or choice-based) debt bondage, the subsumption of 'traditional' patronage systems into 'modern' commerce. It does not discount African workers as 'workers' simply because processes of choice-based indebtedness brought them into the wage labour market. Hill, in particular, has warned against the standardisation of a 'colonial attitude to debt' in studies on African economics, which she states 'was as moral as that of missionaries to adultery and polygyny'.[21]

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[20] Contrary to Marxist theory, Marcel van der Linden has argued for the compatibility of non-free wage labour with the capitalist mode of production. 'Preface', *ISHA Newsletter*, 1 (2011), 1–2; 'Warum Gab (und Gibt) es Sklaverei im Kapitalismus? Eine einfache und dennoch schwer zu beantwortende Frage", in M. Erdem Kabadayi and Tobias Reichardt (eds.), *Unfreie Arbeit: Ökonomische und Kulturgeschichtliche Perspektiven* (Zürich, 2007), 260-79; 'Plädoyer für eine Historische Neubestimmung der Welt-Arbeiterklasse' *Sozial Geschichte: Zeitschrift für historische Analyse des 20. Und 21. Jahrhunderts*, 20 (2005) 7-28.

[21] P. Hill, *Development Economics on Trial: The Anthropological Case for a Prosecution* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 84. She instead described credit-granting as a profitmaking civic duty in the villages of rural West Africa.

Sources

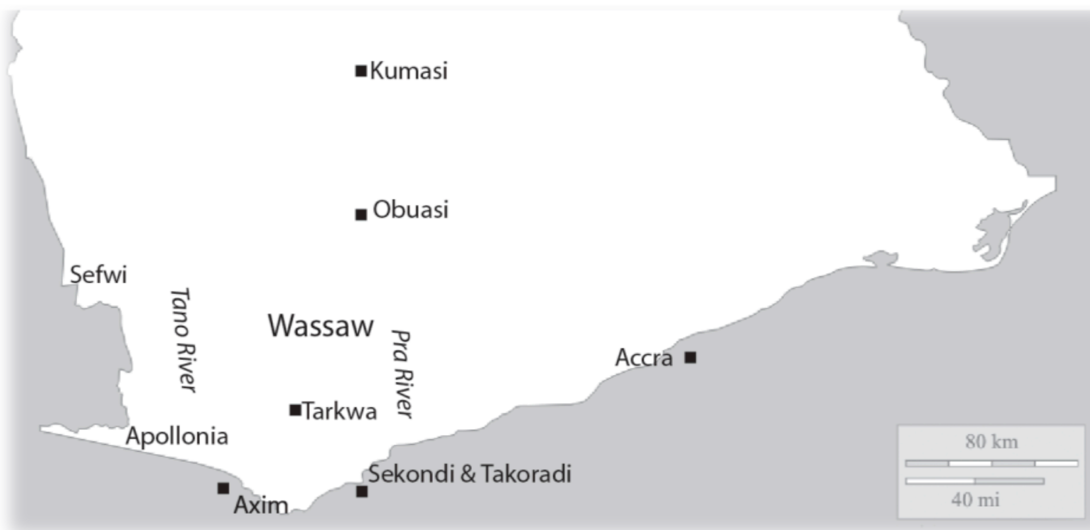
The frenzied gold rush that took place in Tarkwa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produced a broad collection of sources between Ghana, the United Kingdom, and other parts of the globe. Yet, it would be an overstatement to claim that there is an abundance of cohesive sources for the era under investigation. Although this thesis deals with a period just over a hundred years ago, frequent changes in both African and European staff in the mines (both annually and with the sector's various booms and busts), combined with the limited presence of administrative officials, obliged the researcher to rely on different fragments of information in order to reconstruct the mining industry's indirect recruitment practices, which formed the basis for its ever-growing 'labour frontier' over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The presence of only travelling administrators in the area during the period under investigation, made administrative reports few and far between. At the same time, as British officials debated the viability of large-scale gold-mining, administrative reports (ADM 5, ADM 11, [C. 3687], (357)) produced a variety of surveys, occasionally conducted by mine management on behalf of the administration, concerning the demographic character and population size of African workers in the mines. These reports also discussed the range of employment strategies utilised by the mining companies. While the first manuscript, ADM 5, contained a general annual report, ADM 11 included the observations of the District Commissioner on his tours into Tarkwa, including his correspondence with managers in the district. The latter two manuscripts were produced and presented to Parliament.[22] The document includes observational surveys of the individual mines, their production processes and their manner of

[22] PP 1882, [C 3687], Further Correspondence Regarding Affairs of the Gold Coast.

employing Africans, helping to sketch a general image of life in the mining villages in the nineteenth century. The other document makes a similar inquiry for the early twentieth century.[23] However, even more interesting are the accounts of the contemporary working conditions of African labourers contained within them.

Fig. 1. Map of Southwest Ghana



Supplementing the aforementioned administrative evidence are the private papers of Chief Officer Frederick William Hugh Migeod, Chief Officer of the Government Transport Department; an agency developed by the Colonial Office with operations running from 1901 until 1919. They have scarcely been analysed, having been used only in one other study on mining in southwest Ghana and a monograph about the elite class

[23] 1906, (357), Coolie Labour, Accounts and Papers.

of colonial servants governing British West Africa.[24] Although the department only began to hire out contract labourers to the Wassa mines after 1903, few documents are so rich in detail on the subject of recruitment. These even offer descriptions of the advantages and disadvantages of headship recruitment from a European perspective: Migeod discusses the distribution of management responsibilities between African headmen and white foremen in the mines, including forms of employment and disciplining foreign contract labourers.[25] Rates of pay and advances are also listed in numeric detail in these records. In addition, as the closest administrative collaborator to mine managers in Wassa, Migeod's papers also preserve a correspondence with the Mine Manager's Association, whose records have otherwise been lost. The Government Transport Department was at the nexus of imperial and colonial economic policy. Chief Officer Migeod's collection of letter books, press copybooks and confidential and official correspondence therefore form the basis of much of this thesis.

Proceedings from the District Commissioner's court in Tarkwa (ADM 27) have also received little attention from scholars. Although these handwritten trial recordings were not easy to assess, they detail labour disputes severe enough to be heard in British courts starting from the 1870s and covering several decades. Legal documents were an invaluable source for discerning the nature of contestation and collaboration between companies and headmen, as well as between headmen and the members of their gangs. They illuminated aspects of the credit relationships, which are elsewhere only discussed in broad terms. For example, through quarrels between managers and the headmen they

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[24] Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class;* L. H. Gann and P. Duignan, *The Rulers of British Africa, 1870–1914* (Stanford, Calif., 1978).
[25] The documents also mention, albeit frustratingly briefly, the existence of indigenous female labour recruiters for the colonial mines, as will be discussed in chapter 5.

hired for recruitment purposes the significant variability of the amount of advance payment that was offered to workers became evident. In addition, a clear distinction between recruiters furnished with the capital of mining firms and those who relied on their personal capital to recruit was uncovered. Although only a fragment of the records actually deal with the latter type of independent intermediary, I can count myself lucky to have located at least some information regarding their economic activities.

As mentioned above, the records of the Mine Managers' Association have not been recovered, as far as the author is aware. Pieces of the organisation's records have been located as incoming correspondence of other collections, however. In order to reconstruct the careers and perspectives of the cosmopolitan group of entrepreneurs in Wassa after 1900, newspapers and journals from Britain, the US and Australia have been consulted. For example, the *Mining Journal* was an indispensible source of information about the men running the mines and their long-term and short-term visions for economic development. Diaries of former employees in, or visitors to, Tarkwa were also employed to give insight into labour relations in the mining concessions.

Thesis Structure

This thesis traces the expansion of the wage labour market connected to the mechanised gold mines in southwest Ghana through indirect recruitment during the formative years of colonial rule, enquiring into the role of mutual dependence between Africans in this endeavour. A diverse range of sources will be utilised to discern changes in indirect recruitment from the 1870s into the first decade of the twentieth century. In three parts, the thesis looks at the transformation of precolonial institutions for the mobilisation of

African labourers, in particular the subsumption of credit relationships into the mining hierarchy in Wassa. After a short introduction discussing the historiography of industrial labour history in West Africa, as well as the sources and methodology used in this study, chapter 1 begins the discussion of recruitment through African intermediaries, by taking a look at precolonial labour mobilisation strategies. Even the economic exploitation of enslaved Africans generally depended on slaveholders providing them with some economic opportunity and protection. It was by and large the case that a relationship of economic and social dependency was formed between a labourer and an individual in need of labour before colonialisation. The legal end of slavery in 1876 transformed, but did not break this pattern of labour recruitment. Hired labour was more widely available at the start of the colonial period, yet, it remained unusual. Instead, many labourers continued to situate themselves in a temporary relationship of dependency with an African economic authority, or a patron; often a type of creditor. Due to the size of the 'free' labour market, chapter 2 points out that when the first mechanised mines were developed in southwest Ghana from 1877 onwards managers could not locate sufficient disciplined and extended wage labourers to support their sector. They could however engage a much larger market of labourers by incorporating indigenous credit institutions into their hiring process. By offering small loans against their future wages, or advance payments, African intermediaries could secure the labour of men from their home regions. In addition headmen provided welfare duties and further financial benefits to the men they recruited. During the first gold boom in Wassa, Liberian Kru, Bassa, and Grebo men comprised the bulk of the labour force in the gold mines. However, as chapter 3 reveals, during the second gold boom in Wassa – a period of technological development and staff professionalization – recruitment from Liberia became too expensive due to political shifts and judicial constraints in the republic. Mine managers had little choice but to expand their source of supply, both regionally and in terms of engagement. Chapter 4 shows how the Colonial Office came to the assistance of recruitment efforts for the mechanised mines. The Gold Coast Government Transport Department expanded its services to hire out contract labourers to the mines from 1903 onwards, also incorporating the credit system as a regular feature of its hiring practices. Chapter 5 highlights the contributions of independent African recruiters to the growth of the labour force; a trend enabled by growing prosperity created by the indigenous commerce of cocoa. Finally, in chapter 6 we follow the efforts of administrators and employers to end the headship system after 1905 in favour of recruitment through African chiefs, which was purported to be cheaper, more reliable, and promised the recruitment of larger numbers of men in a shorter span of time. Nevertheless, the 'political labour' system failed to provide labourers of equal quality, and heightened political tensions between the British and local African authorities. In 1909 the headship system was reinstated, albeit restricted by extensive rules and regulations.

PART I —

PRECOLONIAL PATRONAGE

CHAPTER 1. From Masters and Slaves to Consensual Labour

In the nineteenth century 'free' wage labour became widely regarded as a universal socioeconomic norm, both in Britain and throughout large segments of the globe.[26] However, in colonial West Africa there was no clear path leading from a pervasive market in slaves to one in which 'free' labour predominated. Ending slavery and debt bondage and realising 'free' wage labour conditions here was a more ambiguous process. In the colonial context of Ghana, many observers fearing tremendous economic disruption after emancipation continued to argue against stripping African elites, most of whom were slaveholders, of their authority. Even among those who favoured voluntary labour, there was no consensus regarding to what extent African labourers should or could be removed from their 'traditional' social structures in order to sell their own labour power. Moreover, if they did manage to do so, might they then not eventually come to expect support and services from a colonial state in training? That the 'backward' slave labour system would become illegal was never seriously contested; but what debates between colonial commentators show is that underlying transition towards 'modern' labour relations was an emphasis on the continued relevance of African economic authorities. Ultimately, for all of the abolitionist rhetoric condemning indigenous slavery and debt bondage, African elites still had to contribute to colonial economic prosperity, as well as political stability. However, the legacy of slavery was

[26] Jan Lucassen, 'Free and Unfree Labour before the Twentieth Century: A Brief Overview', in Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern, 1997), p. 53; For an original voice on the subject, see Seymour Drescher, 'Paradigms Tossed: Capitalism and the Political Sources of Abolition' in Barbara Lewis Solow and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 197–8. But according to Steinfeld this concept had a longer history as a legal ideal. R. J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002).

not witnessed in a prevalence of coerced labour. Rather, relationships of dependency between Africans of high and low economic and social status largely persisted.

While the British imperial strategy for ending slave-raiding and slave-dealing in its colonies in the nineteenth century had been economically and politically sound, given their contribution to rising rates of violence and disruption of trade, the same could not be said for the decision to end indigenous slavery. The different outlooks of individuals in the public and private sphere on this subject were usually rooted in divergent opinions about the nature and dynamics of the indigenous master-slave relationship. The Colonial Office's desire to abolish what the British public viewed as an 'evil' were aggravated by a colonial administration that was confronted with local particularities and the practicalities of socioeconomic change. For those enslaved Africans who needed to break away from excessively exploitative masters, British courts offered avenues for escape. However, for others, maintaining membership of an indigenous kinship network continued to offer numerous advantages. Moreover, more generous terms and possibilities of engagement were becoming available to them.[27] This chapter aims to show how the gradualist policy of the colonial state shaped the expansion of the 'free' wage labour market in colonial Ghana: how, in the struggle to create colonial domination, administrative officials could encourage a survival of relationships of dependency between Africans, including those engaged in 'modern' commerce. In spite of the 'progressive' rhetoric binding 'Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation', economic development was not a monolithic concept within the British Empire.

[27] The spread of the export market in agricultural products made it more viable for former slaveholders to offer annual or seasonal jobs. It also gave former slaves greater options for negotiating work. G. Austin, 'Cash Crops and Freedom: Export Agriculture and the Decline of Slavery in Colonial West Africa', *International Review of Social History*, 54 (2009), 27.

1. 1. Precolonial Labour Mobilisation through African Authorities

Our current knowledge about precolonial slavery in Ghana affirms an image of economic exploitation balanced by certain guarantees in opportunity and welfare.[28] 'Patronage' or 'client slavery' then perhaps more adequately capture this exchange. Unlike the growing trend of urban employment in mid-nineteenth century Europe, which was largely based on hired labour, African systems of labour mobilisation included both an economic and a social element. The Akan of southern Ghana are organised into seven or eight clans, or *abusua*, most of which are constituted through matrilineages. The lineage 'comprised a group of people, male and female, who were imagined to have descended from a single common ancestor or ancestress'.[29] The precolonial household, which in fact comprised an extended family, tended to originate from one member of such a lineage. This was also the most pervasive work unit for precolonial production. In the nineteenth century, heads of household, who were usually male, often struggled to acquire additional hands for duties in farming and / or small-scale mining beyond this basic work unit. Acquiring slaves became the most viable solution to this problem. According to Gareth Austin, slaveholding Akan in the Asante region of Ghana 'chose' slavery above wage labour where there was no alternative to coercion, whether in the form of slavery or pawning or corvée, as a means of recruiting labour from outside the existing household.[30] The source of this challenge was that in this area fertile land was abundant and labourers and capital

[28] Some scholars, arguing for a slave 'mode of production', have interpreted African slavery as a more oppressive institution. P. E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983); P. Manning, *Slavery and African Life* (Cambridge, 1990); M. A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, 1998). C. Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery* (Chicago, 1991).
[29] A. A. Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana: From the 15th to the 19th Centuries* (Accra, 2004), p. 112.
[30] G. Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956 (Rochester, 2005)*, ch 8. The 'household' could include female slaves married to free men, etc.

scarce. Put differently, there was no wage rate that was low enough to be acceptable to potential employers, yet, high enough to attract prospective employees.[31] Therefore, and in order to increase production, there arose a situation where the exploitation of slave labour, predominantly from outside their own community, became the economically rational choice.[32] Slaves, acquired either by purchase, capture, or judicial process, were responsible for the bulk of extrafamilial labour input.[33]

The indigenous slave system in Ghana, distinguished itself from slavery in the Europe and the Americas, in that slaves tended to be assimilated into Akan social structure.[34] By the late nineteenth century there were certainly colonial commentators who viewed the master-slave relationship as abusive.[35] However, the great majority

[31] H. J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System* (The Hague, 1900), p. 257; Most recently, the land abundance theory has been successfully applied to economic conditions in precolonial Asante. Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana*, ch. 8.

[32] Although there were various additional circumstances that could trap an individual in the condition of being a slave, the two most common sources of enslaved African men and women were through violence and purchase. War captives brought into slavery were known as *domun*. Free men could also buy slaves from the north at markets in the southern savanna, such as Salaga, in exchange for goods. These were the *donkos,* or properly *nnonkofuo*. Their purchase price could vary significantly. In nineteenth century Wassa, the price for a slave was around six shillings, or 60 *pesewas*, which was equivalent to a few months of extra-subsistence labour. 'Benchema', in K. Y. Daaku, *UNESCO Research Project on Oral Traditions of Sefwi* (Unknown, 1969), ii, p. 73; children under the age of twenty could however, be acquired for much lower prices. It was also not unheard of for free men to spend as much as £8, a *piredwan* [also preguan] for sought-after men and women. 'Afere' in K. Y. Daaku, *UNESCO Research Project on Oral Traditions of Sefwi-Wiaso* (Unknown, 1969), p. 15. A *piredwan* was the maximum amount used for regular non-chieftancy trading. Austin has complied similar prices for the sale of slaves in nineteenth century Asante. Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana*, p. 164.

[33] Another popular means of acquiring extra familial labour was through the system of debt-bondage. Household heads could acquire pawns as surety against a loan to another family. This also meant that pawns could be got through much smaller sums of money, of around £3 or 60 shillings, than was the case with slaves. However, as they were part of the Akan community, their eventual freedom was implied in the transaction. Until the debt was paid off, the pawn either worked directly for the creditor or passed all of his or her winnings on to him. Economic practices of this kind were challenged by political changes in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century.

[34] There was, quite significantly, the inclination to grant the descendants of slaves 'free' status.

[35] Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana,* p. 119.

agreed on the humane treatment of slaves based on their ties to indigenous kinship networks.[36]

> The Gold Coast master was always humane and considerate. He actually went so far as to consider the slave a member of his family, and to adopt him as such. When his line of descent failed, he promptly named the slave his heir. There is no form of slavery, ancient or modern, to compare with what Gold Coast slavery was.[37]

This is not to deny that the slave held the lowest possible position in this social hierarchy, or that the nature of a particular master-slave relationship boiled down to the dynamics between these two individuals. Moreover, in times of a severe 'family' crisis, slaves were often the first to be sold to ensure the survival of that family, regardless of the nature of their attachment to the household in question.[38] Lastly, masters could threaten slaves with death by human funerary sacrifice.

It has been posited that with the cost of labour eliminated, the household head, now slaveholder, was only obliged to 'survey the labour of his slave, and leave him the mere necessaries of life; whereas in the way of free commerce he would have to produce as much, or nearly as much, as he would get in return'.[39] But perhaps this is too mechanical a view of what happened. Arguably, ongoing and intricate negotiations were often necessary for the slaveholder to extract the labour of a slave over time. Economic exploitation, in other words, had to be extended in a careful and considered manner. Evidence of this is partially seen in the measured exploitation of slaves by the Akan.

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[36] Ibid., p. 117. Some scholars have furthered argued that this process of social incorporation was a more important feature of African indigenous slavery than the extraction of labour. Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, 'African "Slavery" as an Institution of Marginality', in S. Miers and I. Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, WI, 1977), 3-81.
[37] C. Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions with Thoughts Upon a Healthy Imperial Policy for the Gold Coast and Ashanti* (London, 1903), p. 82.
[38] For example, Deutsch discusses the struggle for greater personal security by female slaves in the area of late nineteenth century Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania. J. G. Deutsch, 'Prices for Female Slaves and Changes in their Life Cycle: Evidence from German East Africa' in G. Campbell, S. Miers, J. C. Miller (eds.), *Women and Slavery: Africa and the Western Indian Ocean Islands* (Ohio, 2007), p. 140.
[39] Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System*, p. 257; Instead of a wage, slaves in Wassa could bargain for food and pieces of cloth. Bowler, *Gold Coast Palaver*, p. 104.

Penningroth has posited for precolonial Ghana that 'the economics and ideology of slavery knit together notions of family and property'; masters treated slaves using an ideology of 'belonging' in some instances, and 'non-belonging' in others.[40] Slaves were generally responsible for the most demanding labour duties of the family unit. Moreover, they could be hired out or even given to others.[41] Simultaneously however, according to Perbi, the tasks of slaves were not much more taxing than those of free members of the family.[42] Moreover, there is indication that because they were part of an Akan kinship network, albeit an inferior part, enslaved Africans could expect certain economic opportunities and protections, including the accumulation of wealth, the inheritance of property, and a decision-making ability within the family unit.[43]

In addition, there was some space for the upward economic and social mobility of slaves in precolonial Africa.[44] Independent economic activity was one way in which a slave could become a wealthy individual within his or her society, though the extent of accumulation was likely proportionate to the wealth of his master. For example, in recalling the participation of slaves in precolonial gold mining, an 'old and intelligent' local African man in southern Ghana at the start of the twentieth century recalled that there was a set amount of gold that slaves were required to recover daily in order not to be flogged.[45] He stated that 'each slave had to bring gold to his master of a value of not

[40] D. C. Penningroth 'The Claims of Slaves and Ex-Slaves to Family and Property: A Transatlantic Comparison', *The American Historical Review* ,4 (2007), 1039-1069.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana,* p. 131. Perbi puts forward that only a minority of historical reports speak of their general abuse. Ibid. p. 119.
[43] Ibid., p. 123.
[44] Kopytoff and Miers, 'African "Slavery" as an Institution of Marginality', in S. Miers and I. Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa*, 41; Harms, R., 'Slave Systems in Africa', *History in Africa*, 5 (1978), 333.
[45] Bowler, *Gold Coast Palaver*, p. 102.

less than […] 6 pence per day, but 3 shilling and 5 shilling was generally expected'.[46] Once the master's quota had been met the slave then had the possibility of labouring for him or her self. Though it remains unclear how overtly such independent mining could occur, there was generally little objection to slaves conducting trade activities.

Economic protection also defined the master-slave relationship in this context. A surety relationship existed between the slave and slaveholder, whereby the latter had to cover the personal debts of the former. According to one colonial observer as soon as a slave became part of the household his master was responsible for backing his debts:

> The master is responsible for his debts even those incurred for buying a wife. He must keep him in sickness and idleness. If the slave commit [sic] a crime, or get [sic] engaged in a 'palaver' the master must clear him. So entire is the slave's absorption into the master's family that, on failure of natural heirs, the principal slave succeeds to the property.[47]

Perbi has added that slaveholders 'were also liable to pay compensation and restitution for every injury caused by them [their slave] to other persons wilfully or accidentally'.[48]

Naturally, there were rational limitations to what any slaveholder would tolerate in this respect. At the same time, it is significant to acknowledge that a slave, too, had select tools for retaliation if his master failed to provide such basic entitlements; by running away, or seeking protection from other affluent persons or religious figures.[49] Taking these various aspects into account, those master-slave relationships within Akan society that were primarily based on labour exploitation could be more accurately described as a relationship of dependency, not necessarily rooted in force, domination, or

[46] Ibid.
[47] Boyle, *Through Fanteeland to Coomassie*, p. 192-3.
[48] Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana*, p. 124.
[49] Ibid. pp. 119, 124.

oppression.[50] Many colonial administrators arriving in Ghana during the nineteenth century were also aware of this side of the indigenous slave system.

1. 2. Legal Emancipation and the Colonial Order

When the British colonised West Africa, administrators almost immediately came under pressure from humanitarian organisations, the British public, and Parliament to enforce the ideology of the 'civilising mission' by ending indigenous slavery.[51] British policy mandated that the 'British flag can never float o'er a slave, once under that flag, the slave becomes a free man'.[52] Nevertheless, administrators on the ground had to mediate these morally and politically grounded aspirations stemming from the British Isles, with local economic and social considerations in Ghana. Resulting from this conundrum, colonial action against slavery was diluted, as it was in many other parts of West Africa.[53]

The most meaningful symbol of intervention came with the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1874, the same year that British protection was established over the Gold Coast and parts of its surrounding territories. Nevertheless, there was some debate over how exactly to enact the system of emancipation. On the one hand, it was politically important that abolitionist groups be appeased. On the other hand, the administration was concerned with not alienating slaveholding African elites.[54] Though

[50] This form of client slavery was more often applied to male slaves, as sexual reproduction was an additional, yet, a central function of female slavery.
[51] R. E. Dumett, 'Pressure Groups, Bureaucracy, and the Decision-Making Process: The Case of Slavery Abolition and Colonial Expansion in the Gold Coast, 1874', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 9 (1981), 193-215.
[52] H. Brackenbury, *Fanti and Ashanti: Three Papers Read on Board the S. S. Ambriz on the Voyage to the Gold Coast* (London, 1873), p. 26.
[53] Austin, 'Cash Crops and Freedom', 12-7.
[54] The Emancipation Proclamation was never intended as a tool of economic empowerment for all slaves. Indeed in all of the negotiations that preceded and followed the passing of the bill, it became quite evident that administrators had very little concern for the future liberties of former slaves. The legal end of slavery

colonial officials were glad to do away with the moral taint of indigenous slavery, they were also caught between fears of economic collapse and general disorder because of it. In consequence they took a very cautious approach to implementation. Enacted in 1876, the bill endowed slaves with the right of emancipation, yet, forced them to actively acquire free status in front of British courts.[55] This 'Indian' model of emancipation assured slaveholders of the fact that the administration was not actually encouraging slaves to leave them and seek liberation, though coerced labour would be punished.[56] Even though abolition was broadly endorsed from a political standpoint, the actual steps towards transforming slavery were plentiful and coupled with uncertainty and fear.

One fear of colonial observers was economic collapse because of the purportedly inherent laziness of Africans. One very frank proponent of this position was Frederick Boyle, who was a British correspondent and regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph.* In 1874 Boyle accompanied British troops on the conquest of Asante. Following a visit to Wassa, which he described as a commercial hub of the colony, the journalist petitioned his British audience to reconsider their stance on the issue of abolition. Even though the legal end of slavery had not yet come into effect at this point, Boyle insisted that economic stagnation was accompanying imperial expansion into Ghana:

> The Fantees, squatted each on his own corn patch, under the shade of his own banana, do not attempt to substitute any produce for that lost harvest. Their country abounds with india-rubber (sic). Every village has from five to twenty trees planted in it, for the sole purpose of giving shade […] Never a tree has been tapped on the coast, never an effort has been made to establish self-subsisting commerce.[57]

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gave former slaves a new social and economic status, i.e. new rights, without actually granting them any additional liberties.

[55] T. R. Getz, S*lavery and Reform in West Africa: Towards Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast* (Oxford, 2004), p. 101.

[56] Ibid., p. 102.

[57] Boyle, *Through Fanteeland to Coomassie*, pp. 36–7.

It was not only the agricultural export market that was in decline. He went on to portray the gold mining sector, the 'most important commerce of this part', as 'suffering equally'.[58]

Boyle explained that without the ability of an elite group to force others to work, productive relations were bound to eventually fall apart. Moreover, and much to Boyle's contempt, Africans themselves were not to blame for this crisis. A 'more important agent in reducing the yield of gold was the protectorate itself'.[59]

> The kings of Wassaw like the kings of Ashantee now had once the power to exact a corvée from their people — power we have taken from them. They could and did order out thousands of men to dig gold for their profit, which gold their extravagance and savage generosity soon put into circulation.[60]

In Boyle's opinion, coercion was an absolute imperative for African workers:

> [I]t cannot be too often reiterated — for the English mind is slow to believe such a fact — that the negro is not to be induced to continuous work by any temptation. He must be made [to work] either by necessity or by direct compulsion.[61]

In hopes of shifting the British public opinion, Boyle lamented that 'Our absurd protectorate has withdrawn from the Wassa kings their absolute authority and the return of gold has suffered in proportion'.[62]

Many officials were also afraid of the potential economic consequences of slaves leaving their former homes, which were usually sites of production for profitable small-scale agricultural and mining businesses. The British experience of manumitting slaves in the 1830s in the Caribbean reminded them that once freed former slaves would not necessarily work in the capacities nor in the patterns that their former masters had set out

58 Ibid., p. 34.
59 Ibid., p. 37.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., p. 36.
62 Ibid.

for them.[63] The Colonial Secretary the Earl of Carnarvon himself was personally opposed to the slave trade, however, 'he recognized that both long-standing export goods such as gold and palm products and the potentially profitable crops of gum-copal and coffee, which had recently been introduced into the interior, relied to some extent upon slave labor for production and transportation'.[64] The challenge of keeping these workers in areas where they were desperately needed was evident. Convincing them to return once manumitted would be even greater a task; certainly too enormous for the colonial state at this early stage of its existence.

Colonial officials were also nervous about the financial burden and administrative difficulty of increasing its staff in response to a conceivable mass urban migration of former slaves.[65] They hoped to divert an arrival of this group into colonial towns, which were generally outside of the realm of supervision and control by African elites and under that of a small foreign administration. This possibility was perceived as a direct threat to the colonial order, where African authority and a tiny grouping of British officials formed the shaky foundation of colonial domination.

Out of these various aforementioned concerns officials established a *de facto* policy of not actively encouraging an ending to domestic slavery and debt bondage. When in front of a British audience colonial administrators put great emphasis on an antislavery ideology, but their actions on the ground to implement abolitionist policies were far less straightforward. Abolitionist rhetoric was largely used as pretence against radical intervention into the social and economic lives of local African societies.

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[63] Austin, 'Cash Crops and Freedom', 13; Szereszewski, *Structural Changes in the Economy of Ghana, 1891–1911*, p. 10; F. Cooper, 'African Labor History', in Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labor History: A State of the Art* (Bern, 2006), p. 100.
[64] Getz, S*lavery and Reform in West Africa*, p. 99-100.
[65] Ibid., p. 100.

Abolition was a slow process.[66] It did not run its full course until the 1930s.[67] The pace of change was shaped by the laissez-faire economic principles that dominated the first decade and a half of colonial rule. In addition, the choices of former enslaved Africans were quite diverse. There were also geographical particularities. The pace of change varied greatly between the coast, where colonial forts were located, and the interior.[68] For example, there was considerable difference in the enactment of laws between the Northern Territories, Asante, and the rest of the colony and its protectorates.

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[66] A subject of contention between historians writing about abolition and emancipation in West Africa has been the degree and velocity of social transformation caused by the legal end of slavery. The nature of this transition entails significant theoretical implications for succeeding social and economic developments. A notion of emancipation as a large social upheaval already gained popularity in the 1970s. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*; F. Cooper, 'The Problem of Slavery in African Studies', *The Journal of African History*, 20 (1979), 103–25; Martin A. Klein and Paul Lovejoy, 'Slavery in West Africa', in Jan S. Hogendorn and Henry A. Gemery (eds.), *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London, 1979); G. McScheffrey, 'Slavery, Indentured Servitude, Legitimate Trade and the Impact of Abolition in the Gold Coast, 1874–1901', *The Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), 349–368. Paul Lovejoy presented the decline of slavery as a mass exodus realised by the slave population. He states that it was the 'mass escape of slaves' that forced colonial officials to break their allegiances with the slave-holding elites, in support of a new, more democratic, social order. That same year McScheffrey also imagined an immediate and concentrated response to emancipation. He made the case that British policy and colonial officials were decisively in favour of forced, and other general forms of, unfree labor and that it was their sudden inability to tap into indigenous economic networks for labor supplies after emancipation that was at the heart of the colonial labor scarcity. Emancipation, according to this school of thought, and corresponding to the fears of many contemporary Europeans in the colony before 1874, had a disrupting economic and social effect.

[67] Slavery could also increase in certain areas after the legal end of slavery. For example, in 2009 Gareth Austin highlighted an additional aspect beyond spatial, temporal and other lines of 'unevenness' of abolition. Slaveholding in some areas increased as a result of demands for labour during the abolitionist process. Surveying various cases across West Africa, he posited that 'the economic circumstances of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century West Africa delayed and diluted abolitionist measures'. Austin, 'Cash Crops and Freedom', 1–37. The author also discusses this issue in *Labour, Land, and Capital*, pp. 236–249, 512–515.

[68] Following the work of A. G. Hopkins (1973), another group of scholars, has advocated a more gradualist approach to emancipation. Getz, S*lavery and Reform in West Africa;* P. Haenger, *Slaves and Slave Holders on the Gold Coast: Towards an Understanding of Social Bondage in West Africa* (Basel, 2000). Some of them expounded a cautious and slow, implementation of abolition by colonial officials. Others illuminated a more diverse range of reactions by slaves to the possibility of manumission. These two arguments are of course nonetheless consistent. In 2004 in a comparative study of emancipation strategies in Ghana and Senegal, Trevor Getz illustrated the reactions of slaves and slave-holding elites. In the former colony he pointed to economic and political ties between colonial officials and African authorities as a debilitating factor in the enforcement of emancipation laws. Haenger revealed a similarly convoluted path to emancipation. Neither the Basel Mission Society, though an adamant forerunner for the cause of abolition, nor the colonial state, had straightforward means of ending slavery and debt-bondage. The strategies of the missionaries often conflicted with their own ambitions. Many proponents of this gradualist transformation have also emphasized the uneven spread of abolition in the colony.

Age, gender, and ethnicity also shaped the likelihood and form of emancipation of some former slaves.[69]

1. 3. African Authority and Labour Mobilisation in Colonial Africa

There is no evidence that colonial officials aimed to replace slave labour with wage labour in West Africa, providing alternative employment to freed slaves who comprised around half of the population in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[70] There is equally no straightforward indication that they chose to uphold some of the dynamics of the indigenous labour system, consciously leaving a significant amount of authority for mobilisation in the hands of African economic authorities. Above all, the 'modernisation' of colonial labour relations was a makeshift process, which had an unequal transformative effect through time and space.

There was a wide range of changes in labour relations following the legal end of slavery. Some former slaves, for example, broke all ties with their former masters in order to live on their own and support themselves. However, the administration did not provide enough incentives for the majority of slaves to do the same.[71] Most frequently the new political climate encouraged them to renegotiate their employment relationships, but to nevertheless remain in relationships of dependency with other African patrons. These

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[69] See, for example, Susanne Miers, 'Preface' in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, WI, 1988). Austin, 'Cash Crops and Freedom, 26-9; Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital*, pp. 244, 247, 429;

[70] For West Africa, some historians have presented the British colonial administration as having such an intention. Phillips, *The Enigma of Colonialism*; K. Swindell and A. Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate: the Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834–1934* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 23, 101, 149.

[71] Dumett and Johnson have proposed additional obstructions to slave emancipation in the Ghana. For instance, that some slaves experienced intimidation from their former master so that they would not seek emancipation in front of a court. Raymond Dumett and Marion Johnson, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, and the Northern Territories', in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, p. 78-85.

forms of employment continued to offer them economic opportunity and protection. Slaveholders, as well, did not take such relationships for granted. Over time new types of patronage systems were formed that were 'not linked to specific labour services.'[72]

The question of the dynamics of emancipation and the responses of former slaves and slaveholders to a changing social and commercial context after 1876, illuminates continuities in the mobilisation of labour into the colonial period. Indigenous institutions which existed for the purpose of mobilisation did not only persist in the rural agricultural sector.[73] As chapter 2 demonstrates, since only a minority of African labourers in the mechanised mines of southwest Ghana came to depend on wages on a permanent basis, European employers who were in need of extended and regular labour services also had to incorporate local relationships of dependency into their hiring processes. The colonial economy was significantly shaped by changes resulting from the legal end of slavery, the expansion of colonial commerce, and continuities in the embeddness of clientage in labour relations, even within the wage labour market.

[72] Cooper, 'African Labor History', p. 102.
[73] 'Non-traditional' forms of employment defined by clientage and cash have already been shown to have dominated the colonial agricultural sector. Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana*, pp. 360-1; Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 186-7; idem, *Development Economics on Trial,* ch. 8.

PART II —

CREDIT, CLIENTAGE, AND COLONIAL LABOUR

CHAPTER 2. The Emergence of Career Headmen: The Convergence of a 'Modern' and 'Traditional' Economy

In the previous chapter, patterns of employment relations in precolonial West Africa were explored. Even in its most coercive form, labour mobilisation depended on a certain degree of reciprocity. The clientage relationship, which was a prerequisite for accessing the labour power of others, was shaken but not broken with the legal end of slavery in colonial Ghana in 1876. While many former enslaved Africans chose to work for themselves after the bill was passed, several others continued to work for their former masters or other patrons, albeit under improved conditions. Furthermore, for the colonial administration, which continued to depend on African elites to contribute to the colonial economy and order, this gradual transformation of labour relations was largely seen as the only way forward. This chapter focuses on the recruitment strategies of employers in the mechanised mines of southwest Ghana during the 1870s and 1880s. In particular it looks at the predominant form of bringing labourers to industry through indirect recruitment through career headmen, an institution which involved the incorporation of 'traditional' authority into 'modern' commerce. While headmen have been described as occupying an ambiguous dual role between 'labour' and 'capital', little attention has been paid to the emergence of these figures. Were they an external imposition? Or, an internal response to the labour market conditions described above? Firstly, however, accounts of individual foreign mining entrepreneurs in Wassa during the nineteenth century will help to explain the political challenges facing the mining sector at the time.

Promoters and Prospectors of the Wassa Gold Fields

Timing was an important ingredient for the first gold rush in Wassa as it 'occupied a lull between the New Zealand and Colorado gold rushes of the 1860s and 1870s and the great stampede to the Rand in South Africa in the second half of the 1880s'.[74] Prospecting began in 1877 when a number of European entrepreneurs, as well as a few indigenous ones, attempted to establish profitable large-scale gold mines in Wassa, a state that lay outside the boundaries of the Gold Coast Colony proper, and which had come under British protection just three years earlier. Amongst the 'industry's' early pioneers were numerous former political officials and businessmen who had no scientific knowledge of mining, but who still anticipated making a considerable return from local gold deposits and alluvial mining. The founder of the very first gold mining company which registered here on 10 April 1877 was the 33-year-old French trader Marie-Joseph Bonnat. This was the African Gold Coast Company.

A fellow mining entrepreneur in Wassa described Bonnat as 'a bright, cheery little Frenchman of great energy [with] some knowledge of the Fanti, or rather the Ashanti, language, and perfect experience of the native character'.[75] Being from humble origins himself, Bonnat had reportedly come to Africa seeking to make his wealth:[76]

> Born in the department of Ain, he had early in life longed to see the world, and therefore joined a Niger expedition in 1867. His ship was wrecked in the first storm at sea on the coast of France. Provided with another small vessel they reached the west coast of Africa. Here [he] separated from his countrymen and began to trade, with the assistance of his mulatto servants, going further inland until he at length reached Ho. Here he purchased a quantity of cotton in exchange for cloth and powder, and intended to send his goods to the coast.[77]

[74] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 11.
[75] R. F. Burton and V. L. Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold: A Personal Narrative* (2 vols., London, 1883), p. 298.
[76] M. J. Bonnat, *Marie-Joseph Bonnat et les Ashanti, 1869–1874* (Paris, 1994).
[77] F. Ramseyer and J. Kühne, *Four Years in Ashantee* (New York, 1878), pp. 58–9.

While the start of his career in West Africa was not out of the ordinary, unforeseen circumstances would bring him into intimate contact with the people and king of Asante.

During the period of the third Anglo-Asante conflict Bonnat was employed as the trading manager of the Basel Mission post in Ho, and in 1869 he was taken as a captive to the Asante kingdom.[78] It was during his time here that the Frenchman first learned about the location of the gold mines in Tarkwa and began to develop the personal connections that would facilitate business in the area. Apparently, vital details about the origin of the gold that adorned Asante royalty so bountifully came from the king himself:

> While a prisoner he was treated at times as a prince and at others with greatest cruelty, depending on the vagaries of the king. At times denuded of every stitch of clothing he was compelled to make mud bricks and at night was often tied to a tree so that he could neither sit or lie down. On other occasions he feasted with the king and was shown all his treasures of gold, which were enormous. It was during one of these visits to the king that he first learnt of the Taquah gold mines and determined, whenever released, to visit them.[79]

In the late 1860s, after he was freed from captivity, Bonnat became one of very first Europeans to prospect for gold in the state of Wassa.[80]

Not long after a hopeful Bonnat returned to Paris and, following a lecture at the Paris Geographical Society on the potential of the West African gold fields, he successfully attracted sufficient capital to form a company for the exploration of gold. He founded the Société des Mines d'Or d'Afrique Occidentale, a syndicate devoted to the acquisition of concessions. Two years later, during another trip to Paris in 1878, Bonnat became a founding member of the Anglo-French Compagnie Miniere de la Cote d'Or d'Afrique, or the African Gold Coast Company, which later floated the Tarquah and Abosso concessions. This company was followed by several predominantly British firms.

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[78] During the invasion by the Asante army the Swiss missionary Friedrich Ramseyer, his wife, and two children were also captured.
[79] E. T. McCarthy, 'Early Days on the Gold Coast', *Mining Magazine*, December 1909, 292.
[80] A. Mcphee, *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa* (London, 1926), pp. 50–1.

Other important concessions in the towns of Tarkwa, Tamsu, and Abosso around this period were managed by the Effuenta Gold Mining Company (1879), the Wassa Gold Coast Mining Company (1882), the Abbontiakoon Mines (1880), the Tamsu Gold Mining Company, and the Swanzy Estates (1881), all of which relied on British capital.

British investors were said to have dedicated upwards of £9,000,000 sterling in foreign mining development each year during this period, a considerable yet measured expenditure since such investments remained speculative in nature.[81] Gold mining companies were generally only expected to prosper for a few years at most, and as a result capital investments were never excessive. The bulk of this money came from small-scale private investors, as opposed to major investment sources.[82] James Irvine of Liverpool, Francis Swanzy of London, and Richard Francis Burton and Verney Lovett Cameron were some of the major names behind the first gold boom in southwest Ghana.

For most of the 1870s, James Irvine belonged to the class of general merchants acting along the West African coast. His main business interest had been in palm oil, which until then had been considered to be a primary export of this area. Following a slump in oil prices however, Irvine became a forceful promoter of West African mining. Dumett describes Irvine as a 'self-proclaimed pietistic Christian who took great pride in church membership, charitable public service, and circumspect business dealing, he exemplified the contradictions in European entrepreneurship in West Africa during the mid-Victorian period of informal empire and "the three Cs" (Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization).'[83] On the one hand, Irvine was a philanthropist who advocated for the social, economic, and political development of West Africa. On the other hand, he

[81] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 11.
[82] Ibid., pp. 109-16.
[83] Ibid., p. 111.

followed a cold and calculating business approach, which saw him using misleading promotions to inflate the prices of stock for his companies. Still, Irvine remained a central and prominent figure in connection with this initial gold rush, promoting the field as rigorously as he did. Irvine also collaborated with a number of other entrepreneurs to create further mining businesses. The various individuals he partnered with came from all sides of the debate on labour recruitment for the mines.

The Cinnamon Bippo (1889), for example, was a joint venture between Irvine and Frank Swanzy, whose family had established a commercial presence on the Gold Coast as traders since the late eighteenth century. Frank and Andrew Swanzy were also former palm oil men, who formed mines as subsidiaries to their mercantile firm F. & A. Swanzy, which was rumoured to be the oldest and largest trading firm on the coast.[84] The firm initiated this new venture by developing a quartz vein outside of the town of Abosso, though without great success. Nevertheless, this initial venture 'led eventually to their working the continuation of the banket deposit at Abosso', which prompted the creation of the long-living Wassa Gold Coast Mining Company.[85] The senior partner of the firm, Mr. Frederick J. Crocker, ran the property. Managers and engineers here became notorious for the extensive employment of local casual labourers, known as tributary labourers, as will be shown later in this chapter.

Irvine also went into business with the former explorers Burton and Cameron. In 1881, Burton, who was working for the Colonial Office as acting consul de Trieste in northeast Italy, and Cameron, an avid traveller, were invited to inspect the Wassa gold fields by Irvine himself. Behind Irvine's solicitation was the calculation that these two

[84] McCarthy, 'Early Days on the Gold Coast', 72.
[85] Ibid.

prominent individuals would contribute to the international promotion of West African mining, and indeed immediately upon returning to Europe, Burton spoke to multiple public audiences of the promise of the Wassa gold fields. As part of various opinion pieces published in British newpapers, as well, he made bold contentions, such as the following: 'I take courage by observing that the Gold Coast, which threatens to oust California from her present prominence, is deemed worthy of Yankee jealousy':[86]

> Most of the Gold Coast 'bush' is second-growth, far more easily cleared than that of the Californian foot hills when they were attacked by, the 'Augronauts of '49.' The Yuba ridge of the Sierra Nevada was as densely wooded as most parts of the Gold Coast, and the further we go north we shall find fewer trees, more grass and a greater quantity of gold. In the days of dynamite and clasmasite, disforesting [sic] is an easy matter, and wood burns freely in the open before the rains. That any amount of water can be obtained, not by 'digging a water-hole,' but by Norton's Abyssinian tubes […]. We have said that if cisterns be wanted they can be made on the summits of all the hills. Let it be noted, too, that the rainy season lasts three to four months out of the twelve. During this time every bed rolls a torrent, and the top soil, being thoroughly sopped, is easily removed without blasting. I deny that a fall is necessary, and assert that a force pump of sufficient power will do as weIl as a hydraulic 'monitor.'[87]

In addition, much of Burton and Cameron's journey to the Gold Coast was documented and published in two volumes of *To the Gold Coast for Gold* (1883), in which mining conditions in West Africa were portrayed in optimistic terms. The book even holds the following inscription:

> To our excellent friend James Irvine (of Liverpool, F.R.G.S., F.S.A. &c.) we inscribe these pages as token of our appreciation and admiration for his courage and energy in opening and working the golden lands of Western Africa.[88]

Burton eventually came to sit on the board of Irvine's Guinea Coast Mining Company (1881) and even invested some of his own money into local prospecting, including on the Akankoo mine (1881), though there is no evidence that he ever made any profit from his investments. Throughout his time as a mining entrepreneur Burton was not shy to express

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[86] 'Correspondence of R. F. Burton', *The Mining World and Engineering Record*, 17 March 1883, p. 283.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*.

his opposition to the recruitment strategies of the Wassa Gold Coast Mining Company. Instead, he advocated the importation of coolie labour on a large scale. Details of his promotions follow in this chapter.

European financiers were not the only ones to run concessions in Wassa. There was also a contingency of African investors and promoters who occasionally partnered with James Irvine. They believed that not only the Gold Coast but also a larger West African economy would reap huge benefits from investments in mining development.[89] Joseph Dawson, James Africanus Horton, and Paul Dahse leased and resold properties in the area. During the nineteenth century, in contrast to later periods, Africans also managed productive concessions, such as the Abbontiakoon mines (1880). There were also prominent African promoters living abroad who attempted to induce economic intervention on the part of British officials, including into the labour force, by asserting pressure through various media outlets, as well as through confidential correspondence. As was the case with European entrepreneurs, promotion, management, and investment often overlapped.[90]

Perhaps the most avid African promoter was Ferdinand Fitzgerald, who as editor-in-chief of the London-based *African Times* newspaper, was able to popularise his sentiments for development in front of a politically powerful British audience. In numerous and often lengthy opinion pieces, Ferdinand Fitzgerald framed colonial support for the mining sector as a major modernisation project that British officials only had to permit to take its course. He argued that supplying colonial Ghana with the tools that it needed to advance should not be conceived as carrying any cost to Britain: 'It would be

[89] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 24, 164.
[90] James Horton, for example, was a known contributor to the *African Times* in the 1880s. See, for instance, 'West African Gold Fields', *The African Times*, 1 March 1878, 28.

mere temporary aid from a rich parent to a poor child'.[91] The subject was further discussed in *The African Times* in emotional terms and even linked to the issue of humanitarianism. For instance, in an attempt to portray the British as undermining the economic potential of the region, Fitzgerald declared in one of his editorials entitled 'The West Africa Gold Fields', that 'The garments of the boy of ten years will not adequately clothe the man of thirty'.[92] This image was left to ripen in the minds of an audience that was bent on 'social development'; a British audience that had just helped to realise the end of slavery in this part of the world. None of these calls for British assistance contradicted the fact that Fitzgerald was also a staunch advocate of African self-determination.[93]

A prominent member of the Fante Confederation, a political alliance of 'nationalist-minded' African entrepreneurs and chiefs,[94] Fitzgerald had been an early proponent of British governance over West Africa during a stage in which the Dutch still maintained a presence in the colony. Amongst other reasons, he backed Britain because he saw them as playing a necessary role in the military defeat of the Asante. Nevertheless, in the 1860s these political concerns were directly linked to economic interests. In contrast to the British, the Dutch had a history of supporting the Asante kingdom, despite the frequent disruption in trade between the interior and the coast caused by the Asante. Fitzgerald explained his allegiance to the Queen in a confidential

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[91] 'The Gold Coast Colony Roads and Seaport', *The African Times*, 1 June 1875, 69.
[92] *The African Times*, 1 December 1877, 139.
[93] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 100-1.
[94] In spite of the expansion of the Asante kingdom in the eighteenth century, the Fante of the coastal region of colonial Ghana were in a unique position to shape the terms of British expansion on the Gold Coast, which in turn put them in a strong political and military position during British colonial rule. Nevertheless, self-governance was the ultimate goal of their cooperation. Founded in 1868, the Fante Confederation, which was run by prominent merchants and politicians, asserted the will to rule the Fante people (including all Twi speakers, which many considered to be a dialect of Fante) by means of national Fante law. R. Shumway, *Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, N.Y., 2011), p. 166 n.

letter to the Colonial Office wherein he affirmed that the British favoured 'the promotion of trade and commerce, the development of material resources, the maintenance of friendly relations with the interior, and the general education of the native populations; matters on which the future welfare, prosperity, and advancement of this town, and the interior connected with them, must necessarily depend'.[95]

In the 1870s Fitzgerald continued to assert the responsibility of the British public and private sector actors in the economic affairs of West Africa.[96] At the same time, his goals were becoming more concrete. By now he had moved away from grand concepts of 'progress' and 'civilization' in his writings, to focus on particular items that needed to be addressed by the new colonial state; the Wassa gold fields, now in the international spotlight, gave him an ideal platform to express his ideas. Fitzgerald came up with a lengthy list of demands to the British government in connection with the development of the mining sector, which included issues of land privatisation and the need for a more sophisticated transport system. As early as 1875, immediately following the conflict with Asante and right before the legal emancipation of slaves had been enacted, Fitzgerald called for the construction of government roads and the clearance of waterways connecting the mines to the coastal region:

> The work of reconstruction must now be diligently carried on; and most influential in this work will be the formation of solid, permanent highways, for facilitating intercourse between the coast and the interiors, for cheapening the transit of produce and goods; and thus promoting the development of agriculture and those other rich sources of wealth with which a beneficent Creator has so richly endowed those inter-tropical Gold Coast countries.[97]

Still, the issue of transportation would trouble entrepreneurs for some time to come.

[95] PRO CO 879/4, No. 49, 'Mr. FitzGerald to the Earl of Kimberley', 2 March 1872.
[96] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 164.
[97] *The African Times*, 1 June 1875, 68.

Another topic that Fitzgerald raised in his various public and private correspondences was that of more transparent property rights in land. He contended that 'giving a value and security of possession to land, will certainly attract capital, — capital will give beneficial labour employment':[98]

> The infection will spread among the natives. Kings and chiefs will see what can be done by improvement on their lands. A class of proprietors, with defined, transmissible, or hereditary titles, will strive to improve that to which he has an immutable title, and which he may sell, or give, or bequeath to others.[99]

Tied to the subject of property rights in land was the creation of a surplus in labour. Though he is not explicit on this issue, Fitzgerald repeatedly mentions the importance of developing better markets. Thus, in contrast to Burton and Cameron and the managers of the Wassa Gold Coast Mining Company, he appears to have envisioned the disciplining of African labour as being necessary for the purpose of economic progress. Until this task had been fulfilled, Fitzgerald predicted that the region would remain a 'mere swaddles baby, in comparison with the productive and commercial giant, as which it will be known hereafter'.[100] Such a destiny would remain unfulfilled unless 'Great Britain shall awake to the consciousness of those vast resources, the key to which has been placed in her hands'.[101] At such a point, he argued, 'active life will displace stagnation':[102]

> The people and the country will for the first time live. A genuine spirit of progress will be infused; and Christian civilization will, it may be hoped and expected, not only spread over and embrace the whole of the British territories (for such they must become for any good whatever be accomplished) but pour its vivifying rays far into those interior lands whose people are now continually looking and pressing towards that sea-coast, whence alone they can obtain the few products of foreign industry which they covet.[103]

[98] *The African Times*, 1 April 1875, 43.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

The intimate connection between commerce and civilisation bound the government to act.

Fitzgerald also illuminated more straightforward economic arguments for colonial intervention. Speaking as a gentleman of West African origins himself, the Liberian Fitzgerald trusted that the economic awakening of colonial Ghana would have a spillover effect on the rest of West Africa. Even more significantly, however, the British Isles stood to benefit from such intervention. Mechanised gold mining in Ghana, he predicted, would simultaneously advance the British cause of introducing the universal gold standard at a stage in which there was still much anxiety over its irregular supply, for 'Not only are the interests of England more deeply involved in this question of an adequate gold supply than those of any other civilized community, but it is pre-eminently her duty, as the great inventor and propagator of the gold currency theory and practice, to stimulate that supply by every legitimate means in her power':[104]

> [The] world's realized stock of gold, is not at present equal to, and does not keep pace with, the world's requirements.[…] The monthly yield in California and Australia, are watched with feverish anxiety, and there is a financial wail over the gradually progressing diminution of the supplies.[105]

Could West Africa possibly be the key to a more stable level of exploitation and global trade and production? In Fitzgerald's opinion, the rates of global consumption of gold all but mandated a new gold rush:

> It is not only that the gold currencies need all, and more than all, the gold that is now yearly produced, but that the increasing luxury of advancing civilization is a glutton of insatiable appetite, capable of eating up another Australia, and still reiterating the horse-leech cry, "Give! Give!"[106]
> […]

[104] 'The West Africa Gold fields', 139.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

> If, as is generally admitted, there be evidence of a gradual exhaustion in the gold fields of Australia and California, at the same time that the world's wants of the precious metal are extending and increasing, new fields must be energetically worked.[107]

'Under these circumstances',[108] he declared, 'we cannot but deplore, as a grievous error, the indifference, the absence of all effort — nay, more, the obstructiveness [sic] — of the British Government as regards the development of the undoubtedly rich gold fields of West Africa'.[109]

Government Priorities for Economic Development

Even though there continues to be some contention surrounding the subject of the relationship between the colonial state and the mines in Wassa in the 1870s and 1880s in the existing literature, most historians would agree that political officials did not prioritise the aims of private capital.[110] Nevertheless, with the growing presence of prospective miners in the southwest, Ghana officials could not ignore the mechanised mines entirely, and in 1882 the first commissioner to Tarkwa District in Wassa was appointed. Though, at first glance, Commissioner Cuscaden's placement may appear to be a concession to the pressure of mining entrepreneurs for a greater administrative presence in this region, in actuality the commissioner to Tarkwa had no magisterial powers.[111] He had evidently not been sent to enforce British law in this area. Instead, he was on a mission to assess the prospect of finding gold in large and payable amounts versus the possible burden that the

[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] The degree of collaboration between the administration and the mechanised mining has been contested. In Dumett's study, among a wide range of topics, he elaborates on the troubled interactions between the public and private sectors between 1875 and 1900. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, Chapter 6. This assertion was later contested by Akurang-Parry, who suggested that the shortage of gold encouraged the British to intervene in Wassa starting in the early 1880s. 'To Wassa Fiase for Gold', 12.
[111] *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure in No. 8 in [C 3687], p. 20: Second Monthly Report on the Tarquah District, May 31 1882.

'industry' could impose onto the administration in Accra. It is naturally difficult to assess the precise impact that Commissioner Cuscaden's report of the mining industry had on the economic predilections of officials in Accra. However, given that his assessment was a negative one, his findings at the very least reinforced the ongoing colonial economic policy of non-intervention and *laissez-faire*. Following his first report, which was then circulated in a confidential dispatch between the Lieutenant Governor W. Brandford Griffith and Colonial Secretary John Wodehouse, written on 22 November 1882, the former made the damning conclusion that 'not a single mine in or about Tarquah will pay'.[112]

During his two-year appointment in Tarkwa between 1882 and 1883, the Irish William Andrew 'Tim' Cuscaden, with the assistance of temporary Commissioner Henry Higgins, drew up an extensive four-part *Report on the Gold Mines*, which was later sent to the Governor and the Colonial Secretary.[113] His three primary concerns were that mechanised mining was above all self-serving to the prospectors alone and unlikely to augment wealth in the colony; that new markets developing around the industry were politically disruptive; and, finally, that backing large-scale industry was harmful to the indigenous commerce that had been carrying the colonial economy thus far, and on which many hopes were placed on for the future.

During his investigation, Cuscaden gained first-hand experience of the ugly side of an industry that was highly dependent on unsubstantiated promotion for profitability. He reported back to officials in Accra that many companies seemed more interested in manipulating shareholders in London than in actually constructing a profitable business

[112] PRAAD ADM 12/3/1, No. 26, p. 94.
[113] Henry Higgins was temporarily appointed District Commissioner of Tarkwa during Commissioner Cuscaden's eight months of sick leave.

that would bring wealth to the region. In reference to this, the Commissioner relayed a story that a mining engineer from London working at the Gold Coast Mining Company, had shared with him. The engineer had been offered £100 to produce a favourable report on local operations by 'a gentleman who is at the head and tail of most of the mines in Tarkwa district'; most likely, James Irvine himself.[114] Of another prominent company of Irvine's, namely the Effuenta Gold Mining Company, Cuscaden indicated that the frequent praise they received in the *African Times* was entirely ludicrous, because 'when two tons of quartz were purchased from Effuenta and shipped to England it hardly showed a particle of gold'.[115] Endorsements of this kind had less to do with the actual performance of the concession than with the fact that Ferdinand Fitzgerald, mentioned above, was also serving as the secretary of the company at the time.[116] As Commissioner Cuscaden saw it, 'the statements made in England by people in connection with the mines are calculated to mislead the public'.[117] Floating companies, and later projecting profits on speculative ventures, was a standard practice among many of these early mining prospectors.[118]

Still, the administration was less concerned with the profits it could make from mining than with the financial burden that the industry could place onto it. Not only did Cuscaden perceive many of the new mining entrepreneurs as greedy, he also regarded them as reckless with their planning. The Commissioner anticipated groups of European labourers and entrepreneurs arriving in the colony, falling sick, and expecting the

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[114] PRAAD ADM 12/3/1, p. 95.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 105, 234–238.

government to cover their passage back home to Britain.[119] It was no secret that the climate was unforgiving. White workers did not adapt well to the fever-ridden conditions in Tarkwa district in Wassa. In his report, Cuscaden described an area where on ‘both sides are stagnant swamps, the exhalations from which quickly affect the constitution of the European’.[120] He also reported that a high mortality rate among white mineworkers had gravely diminished levels of productivity on the various concessions, leading to a relative loss in revenue.[121] The potential costs of mining developments to the administration was a critical issue at this point since British officials were still dedicating considerable manpower and resources to the military campaign against the Asante kingdom at the time that mining entrepreneurs were pushing the frontier of permanent European settlement into the turbulent rural interior. Resources were stretched thin and politics were also volatile.

Nonetheless, the political worries that Cuscaden discussed in his reports did not involve the Asante kingdom. Rather, he was uneasy about the potential ill-effects of a rising concession boom that was developing around the mining villages, especially its potential to erode traditional authority. Apinto in Tarkwa district was one area that was being particularly ravished by ‘land grab’. The Commissioner relayed that there was ‘hardly a square mile in the province of Apinto that has not been rented’:[122]

[119] PRAAD ADM 12/3/1, p. 96; after 1900, on several occasions British employees that had been let go from the employment with gold mining companies were left destitute and had to ask the colonial state to cover the cost of their passages to England. The deportation of these so-called ‘undesirables’ was a heavy burden on the state’s expense leading into the second boom period. See, PRAAD ADM 5/1/12, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1903; PRAAD ADM 5/1/13, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1904; D. M. Guggisberg and F. G. Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa* (New York, 1909), pp. 124–5.
[120] *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure 1 in No. 1 in [C 3687], p. 1: Report by Civil Commissioner Cuscaden, 31 August 1881.
[121] PRAAD ADM 12/3/1, p. 94.
[122] *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure 3 in No. 1 in [C 3687], p. 3: Report by Civil Commissioner Cuscaden, 31 January 1882.

> This indiscriminate granting of concessions will lead to serious complications in future, unless rules and regulation are established for the better guidance both of the Europeans and native landowners.[123]

In addition to encouraging land disputes between chiefs and kings, who very often did not have precise records or knowledge of their land boundaries, land-grab had given birth to a new professional class that was in charge of brokering land leases. The travelling commissioner spoke of educated African businessmen, who he referred to as 'bush-magistrates' because they were securing the loyalties and the land of local authorities in order to sell it to third party business interests. The influence of this growing class of African business elites in Wassa alarmed colonial officials as they had been operating entirely independently, overseeing all business negotiations between local kings and chiefs and European businessmen. There was no legislation to restrict their activities. Conniving bush-magistrates were also supposed to hold significant power over purportedly foolish 'traditional' authorities such as Ashanta, the King of Tarkwa, who both Cuscaden and Higgins described as (nearly) blind in a physiological sense, too.[124] Joseph Dawson of Cape Coast was specifically named as one of the infamous bush magistrates functioning in Wassa in the context of an 1882 report. Before serving as a 'political agent' for French and British companies, he had been educated by the Wesleyan mission and later took up an administrative post with the British colonial government in Ghana.[125] By the 1880s, according to the Commissioner, Dawson exercised[126] 'the

[123] Ibid.
[124] *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure 2 in No. 1 in [C 3687], p. 3: Report by Civil Commissioner Cuscaden, 31 December 1881; *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure in No. 8 in [C 3687], p. 20.
[125] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 103–4.
[126] As his power in the leasing of concessions to foreign companies grew, his ambitions to promote the mining industry became more relentless. During the fourth conflict of the war between the British and the Asante, for example, the manager of the Effuenta Mines accused Dawson of actively blocking news of an acute Asante attack and bribing local chiefs in order to keep production going. PRAAD ADM 11/1/845, 'Effuenta Gold Mines Company to District Commissioner Tarkwa District'.

greatest authority over the chiefs and people in the district of Apinto, and indeed I may say throughout the whole of Wassaw'.[127] Dawson and other African intermediaries were accused of helping European mine managers to dupe local chiefs, and of making a nice profit for their services. Although the kings and chiefs claimed to rule the various stretches of land around Wassa, Civil Commissioner Cuscaden believed that 'they are completely in the hands of one or other of the European managers'.[128]

Commercial activity of this sort had to be contained without delay because it interfered with the political system of indirect rule. Once a chief's judgement was clouded with expensive gifts and embellished promises by other players, the British might question his loyalty. Cuscaden claimed to have put an end to the activities of the powerful brokers:

> I am glad to be able to report that I have succeeded in putting a stop to these careers. A circular issued by the late Governor, Mr. Ussher, pretty clearly showed these persons what they might expect if they were detected.[129]

Nonetheless, throughout the 1870s and 1880s, men like Dawson, Ferdinand Fitzgerald, Paul Dahse, and James Africanus Beale Horton continued to have a strong influence on local political and economic life.

A third argument underscoring colonial non-intervention in Wassa which was connected to the conflicts resulting from land sales was the potential impact that changing property rights would have on indigenous commerce. As far as the Commissioner Cuscaden was concerned, independent miners 'for a long time to come will be the real prospector of the wealth of the soil of this country' and therefore should

[127] *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure 2 in No. 1 in [C 3687], p. 3.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

not be driven out of the area.[130] He wanted to ensure that traditional African miners continued to have access to land for farming and digging gold:

> Right should be given [to] him to search, dig, and prospect wherever he liked outside the leased land, and when he is successful, a certain number of fathoms square should be granted [to] him free of royalty, as his property, from which he could not be driven so long as he kept working on it. Should, however, he give up work for any length of time, say one year, he should lose all right and privileges.[131]

Indeed, he suggested that the government expand privatisation rights for traditional miners in order to stimulate further growth in that segment of the market.[132] He correctly expected traditional mining to outperform large-scale mining for the foreseeable future.[133]

If the gold mining frontier in Wassa was similar to gold rushes in other parts of the world in terms of its stages of development, it was also unique; firstly, in terms of the limited scope of European migration and settlement that it attracted, and, secondly, in terms of the interactions between mining entrepreneurs, local officials, and the indigenous population in the area.[134] The Cuscaden report confirms the argument that in contrast to other colonial territories, such as Ceylon, Jamaica, and South Africa, economic development in colonial Ghana was not a priority of the British imperial system before the 1890s. The demands of the mining entrepreneurs were largely ignored. Not only did the administration refuse to identify with the mines, but mine management was also left to handle related issues such as the recruitment of affordable labour; a challenge compounded with numerous internal problems, including weak management

[130] *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure 3 in No. 1 in [C 3687], p. 4.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa.*
[134] Ibid., pp. 15-7.

and under capitalisation, to name a few.[135] Around the 1870s and 1880s a particular group of African intermediaries, the headmen, became indispensable to the mobilisation of wage labourers for in the gold mines.

2. 1. Recruitment during First Gold Rush of 1879 to 1885

Scattered around the Wassa gold fields, managers at most of the mining concessions in Wassa yearned to hire unskilled labourers for surface and underground mining in a steady and extended manner, so that they could achieve and apply a certain level of skill and efficiency.[136] However, since local Akan labourers were sparse and resistant to wage dependency, and because they shared a widely held prejudice against underground work, this was a difficult task.[137] The records of various mining companies reinforce the point that, contrary to what has been argued for the South African mining industry, mining entrepreneurs in nineteenth-century Ghana did not seek to manufacture a system of oscillatory migration as a means of obtaining labourers precisely when they needed them

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[135] The weaknesses of the nineteenth-century mining industry in terms of the managerial, technical, and scientific competency of the men in charge, have been outlined in detail elsewhere. For example, John Silver's study of the failure of European mining firms in the nineteenth-century Gold Coast addresses the ample weaknesses of the mines and their owners, leading to an inability to capture mineworkers in the late nineteenth century. Silver, 'The Failure of European Mining Companies', 511–29.

[136] Following Dumett, the narrative of 'cheap labour theory' does not fit the case of nineteenth-century colonial Ghana. He has convincingly argued that there is no indication that mine managers deliberately constructed a non-permanent migrant labour force to lower labour expenditures and to enhance control. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 224–5, 233. A further argument against the economic rationality of oscillatory migration, whether on the part of employees or employers, is put forward by Cooper, as it 'presumes that the balance of resources in "precapitalist" areas and the labor needs of "capitalist" ones balanced just right, that the labor force which oscillatory migration produced was sufficiently disciplined, skilled, and socialized to do whatever tasks were at hand, and it fails to ask why males and females, elders and youth, followed the proper cues'. Cooper, 'African Labor History', p. 102.

[137] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 271. In one of the many failed attempts by mine managers to attract local men, predominantly Akans, for longer terms of service, companies built villages in the proximity of their mines 'on the chance that the natives would live there and become available as labourers'. 'West African Mining', 324

and at cheap rates. Rather, the constant movement of labourers between the rural and urban space was a source of considerable frustration.[138]

There was a consensus among employers that the payment of dividends to shareholders depended heavily on the proper organisation of the labour supply, and that the most cost-effective manner of hiring African labourers was by keeping them in the wage labour market for an extended period of time. Accordingly, mine managers in Wassa preferred to have their employees sign six to twelve month contracts; labourers generally being reluctant to agree to longer terms of service. For instance, Burton and Cameron were evidently annoyed when they argued that 'The men's services are lost just as they are becoming valuable'.[139] Labourers' recurring patterns of migration between the agricultural and wage labour market, and the constant need to train new men, were financially damaging to these young firms. From the perspective of employers, only contract work could improve such dire circumstances.

In 1903 a manager in neighbouring Ashanti named contract work as the most efficient and economical form of employment:

> We may have to make some little consideration in one or two places, to encourage the boys to work on contract. We get more work done and its far cheaper [and] it gives better satisfaction to both parties.[140]

Contract labourers, working on agreement, required less supervision and less immediate capital. The manager in Ashanti is mostly likely making a comparison with piece work labourers when he described them as also being cheaper.[141]

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[138] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 269–70.
[139] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, ii, p. 334.
[140] LMA MS14171, vol. 12, p. 555: 'Mine Manager F. Stone to the Secretary for Mines'.
[141] Employers even complained about Liberian contract men who tended to work on 12-month contracts. According to one administrator, 'Another disadvantage to progress is the necessity of getting fresh kroomen; they will only engage for a year at a time, and nothing will induce them to remain longer, and the consequence is that about the time they are really becoming skilled and useful labourers, their period of

Local Labour: Tributary and Piecework Men

According to Dumett's estimates, around one third of the unskilled labour force in nineteenth-century gold mines consisted of local labourers from southern Ghana who were often exclusively willing to serve as tributary or piecework labourers. Often referred to as 'Fanti' or 'Akan' in the source, the employment of these men was often surrounded by suspicion, frustration, and even disdain. Burton and Cameron, who reinvented themselves as mining men in Wassa in the nineteenth century, were amongst the entrepreneurs who refused to accept independent labourers on their properties. Moreover, they spoke derogatively of those employers who chose to do so. Tormented, they recorded that the 'country-people, Fantis, Accra-men, Apollonians of Bein, and others, will work, and are well acquainted with gold-working; but they work in their own way'.[142]

One of the earliest accounts of a headman in Wassa holding indigenous notions of authority and not relying on the capital of a mining firm in order to recruit, is found in the lifestory of the headman Coffi Accra, an individual who was 'employed occasionally at task work' at the Abosso Mines.[143] In 1883 Accra was recorded as leading the only independent gang working for the Abosso Gold Mining Company (Compagnie des Mines d'Or Abosso). Not much was known about him other than that he had been a successful 'traditional' miner in the past. In 1866 Accra dug his first pits with the permission of the local chief Enemil Kwao Kuma or his predecessor and before long Accra had become a

service is up and they themselves off to their homes'. *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure in No. 27 in [C 3687], p. 73: 'Fifth Monthly Report on the Tarquah Gold Mining District', 21 September 1882.

[142] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, ii, p. 333.

[143] PRAAD ADM 11/1/845, No. 18, 'Arthur Bowden to the Colonial Secretary'.

reputable gold miner.[144] Therefore, when the land he worked on was sold to the Abosso Mines 'certain mining rights were reserved to [him]', as well as other traditional miners.[145] This arrangement seems to have worked smoothly for several years leading into the period in which the mine became fully productive in 1881. During that time, Accra was assigned 'to work certain shafts on the property on tribute', in addition to occasional work as a porter.[146] To this purpose he constructed a small camp on the concession, wherein resided the eight to ten workers who were part of his gang.

As was usually the case with tributary labour, mine management had little input over both the hiring and the supervision process as it was conducted by Accra. Indeed manager A. Bowden admitted to not really understanding the nature of the relationship between Accra and his men and how he got them to work in the first place. On the one hand, Bowden referred to the labourers as 'principally relatives' of Accra; indicating that they had some sort of intimate bond.[147] On the other hand, Accra was described as being headman of the part of the village where these men lived, as if it was political power that allowed him to exploit their labour.[148] As mentioned in chapter 2, tributary labourers and others who worked in a largely independent manner, were disliked by foreign employers.[149] Employers distrusted them for stealing equipment. Most mine managers also thought they were too expensive.

Certain mine managers had adopted the indigenous tributary labour system to fit the current needs of their properties. In precolonial Akan Ghana, tribute had a function as

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Chapter 2, pp. 53-8.

a form of taxation, as well as for extra-subsistence production. Often conquered communities were obligated to respond to the requests of the conquering chiefdom or kingdom for labour in this manner. By providing certain goods, most often gold or slaves, they could prove either their loyalty or submission. This exchange should, however, not be confused with the related commercial system of 'tributary' labour, which emerged as a means of monetising land rights, and which fits the practice employed by mine management in Wassa.[150] Whether with regards to mineral or agricultural farming, in the context of land abundance, landowning chieftaincies tended to encourage the occupation of their lands by foreign and local producers. Yet, they demanded tribute as a token payment in recognition of their continuing and rightful ownership of the land. When dealing with their own subjects, chieftancies usually asked for one third of the earnings. This amount could be as high as two thirds in the case of migrant producers. Employers in the gold mines adopted an almost identical system in the 1870s, whereby they accepted groups of independent labourers to work on their properties on a casual basis. These individuals did not receive a wage, but instead retained between one third and two thirds of the gold-bearing ore they had dug up on a daily basis. Burton and Cameron were particularly dismayed by this practice. They recorded in their travel diaries that the 'French mines supply them [tributary labourers] with tools and powder, and, by way of pay and provisions, allow them to keep two-thirds of the produce'.[151]

The high cost of employing tributary labourers was one issue. Nevertheless, these groups also stood to profit in other ways that were detrimental to large-scale businesses. Since mining companies allowed them to use items in the ownership of the firm in order

[150] Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana*, p. 102-4.
[151] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, ii, p. 333.

to dig for gold, for indigenous miners working for a concession on tribute provided an further opportunity to explore new technologies. Most likely it was precisely the access to company capital and not the wage rates that attracted otherwise independent labourers to this form of employment.[152] As reports of labourers stealing items such as dynamite from concessions increased, local entrepreneurs naturally became increasingly weary and distrustful of such groups, who generally worked under their own supervision. In the opinion of Burton and Cameron, tributary labour was simply not an economically feasible form of mine employment:

> It is evident that such an arrangement will be highly profitable to the hands who will pick the eyes out of the mine, and who will secrete all the richest stuff, leaving the poorest to their employers.[153]

In addition to high earnings, theft was another concern. Therefore, most companies appear to have only used this system in times of capital shortages, or when critical machines were defunct. For example, in 1889, when the stamps broke down at the African Gold Coast Company, the manager was reported to have handed over more than 600 tons of quartz ore to tributary labourers, who retained one third of what they could separate during the process of pulverisation, washing, and separation from the precious gold.[154]

The numerous disadvantages that tributary labour posed to large-scale mines makes it even more surprising that one company did whole-heartedly incorporate tributary men *en masse* into its labour organisation. The Wassa (Gold Coast) Gold Mining Company, which ran the Adjah Bippo and Cinnamon Bippo concessions and belonged to the Swanzy Estates. On these properties Frederick J. Crocker had installed

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[152] See the story of the tribute miner Coffi Accra in Chapter 5, pps. 176-8.
[153] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, ii, p. 333.
[154] PRAAD ADM 12/3/1, p. 94.

under his leadership a number of individuals who had lived in colonial Ghana for some time, and who had extensive knowledge of the region and its people. There was a former trading agent of the Swanzy company, the educated African William Edward Sam, who, in spite of a position with the colonial state, had been enticed into leading this new venture, together with his sons, Thomas Birch Freeman Sam and William Edward Sam Jr.. The sons additionally had some formal training in engineering.[155] The Sams were depicted as 'different from the other managers' in their style of management.[156] In particular, the hiring of predominantly local Akan labourers, including 'Wassaws, Fantis, Apollonians, etc.' was linked to them.[157]

> [Crocker] also mines at Adja Bepow on a different plan from the others; instead of paying a fixed wage per diem to the miners, each shaft is leased to certain people who receive one third of the output as their payment.[158]

Of the 230 African labourers on the payroll of the Adjah Bippo in 1889 only thirty were listed as Liberian Krumen (who were predominantly contract labourers).[159]

Employment on the Cinnamon Bippo concession, which was managed by the Sams and the brothers Louis and David Gowan, was similar. When Commissioner Cuscaden visited the other property that same year he commented that, 'a system of tributing exists here by which the natives of the neighbouring village Ebukroom Indjim are allowed to extract surface ore, half of which is supplied to the mine and half they crush and wash themselves'.[160]

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[155] For example, Governor Griffith described the younger Sam in the following manner: 'Mr. T. B. F. Sam, the manager of the Aja Bippo is a young native gentleman, who has been educated at the Crystal Palace School of Engineering, and is, I should think, a most reliable man. *Parliamentary Papers 1889*, No. 66 in [C 5620-24], p. 11.
[156] *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure 1 in No. 19 in [C 3687], p. 54: Commander Rumsey to Colonial Secretary, 4 September 1882.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] *Parliamentary Papers 1889*, No. 66 in [C 5620-24], p. 12.
[160] Ibid.

It is not clear why the Swanzy mines chose this path of employment. However, employing the tributary system was not necessarily a way out for 'less ambitious' managers, as has been suggested in the literature.[161] It is also highly unlikely that managers on the Adja Bippo and Cinnamon Bippo were forced into this position mainly for reasons of low capitalisation. After the death of Andrew Swanzy, Francis Swanzy showed an increased yet still cautious interest in mining development.[162] Though the firm's local mining investment continued to be a low-priority venture geared predominantly for supplementary income, managers on these properties would have had a higher availability of loans due to their linkages with the successful Swanzy trading firm. To what extent, then, were the managers driving this recruitment strategy? Dumett has suggested that their compromising stance on employment was mandated by a need to uphold good relations with local authorities, as well as with African labourers, for the sake of the trading business.[163] Following this argument, the skills of the Sams to navigate the local labour market and deal with local groups was only a small part of the reason why tributary labour was used so widely on these two concessions.

If the tributary labourer worked mostly in small underground pits, their counterpart in surface mining was the piece work labourer. Though the pioneering gold mines in Tarkwa were mechanised, they remained highly dependent on labour for an array of jobs that kept the machines running. Piecework labourers received a daily wage for the completion of various tasks; for example, collecting and cutting wood. In addition to fuelling the machines, labourers were also frequently hired for a variety of jobs in breaking and separating the ore:

[161] Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*, p. 20.
[162] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 110.
[163] Ibid., p. 111.

> The Swanzy establishment has set up an exceptionally light battery of twelve stamps, made in sections for easier transport. Neither here nor many of the mines have stone-breakers or automatic feeders yet been introduced: the stuff is all hand-spalled.[164]

Moreover, once the ore had been broken into little pieces, there were many other jobs that had to be done by hand. In order to separate the 'black sand' that resulted from the crushing process, labourers were occasionally hired to wash the ore using coarse grey blankets to which the sand would cling. In the washing-houses African women were often hired to use traditional panning techniques, separating the sand in calabashes in order to recover the remaining gold particles.[165] Not even the introduction of deep-level mining after 1900 had the effect of eliminating piece work occupations in surface mining altogether.

Indentured 'Coolie' Labourers

To offset the irregularity and cost of hiring independent men, mining entrepreneurs put extra effort into securing contract labourers, who would work for extended periods of time. It is significant, however, that the most popular solution of employers in the mining sector to the labour shortage was not to instil more discipline in African labourers, nor was the notion of collaboration with 'traditional' African authorities ever eagerly promoted in mining circles. Rather, mine managers who intended to create a more stable labour force argued in favour of the importation of coolie labourers from other parts of the British Empire, a strategy that had been used to obtain large groups of labourers in various parts of the globe since the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.[166]

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[164] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, ii, p. 277.
[165] Ibid., p. 269.
[166] See, for example, K. O. Akurang-Parry, '"We Cast About for a Remedy": Chinese Labor and African Opposition in the Gold Coast, 1874–1914', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 34 (2001), 365–84; H. Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labor Overseas, 1830-1920*

Burton was one of the greatest supporters of a large-scale importation of Chinese and Indian labourers. He promoted the idea whenever he could, often purposely ridiculing conditions on the properties of the Wassa Gold Coast Mining Company to underline his point. The coolie labour propaganda was sold as a way of gaining disciplined, reliable men, who were not averse to hard labour under harsh, tropical conditions. Moreover, many of these individuals also had already acquired mining skills and experience. Numerous entrepreneurs and officials regularly praised the productive potential of Chinese and Indian men and at the same time condemned the indiscipline of the African workers. Mine managers in favour of the scheme also anticipated the arrival of indentured labourers, who would work for extended periods of time from one to two years or even longer. They were convinced that local Akan men 'are incapable of regular and continuous labour' and regarded Asian labour as the cure to the idleness of men living in southern Ghana.[167]

Burton and Cameron proposed introducing Asian labourers to meet the need of large-scale production and to lower labour expenditures in West Africa:[168]

> The whole West Coast, Liberia included, is crying out for coolie labour, and the French of Senegal have effected the navvy importation; already their trains are beginning to run. We questioned every one who could enlighten us, and we did not hear a dissenting voice, except from Government officials, whose predilection for *quieter non movere* [sic], for letting sleeping dogs lie, for reporting things pleasantly, and for ignoring unpleasantness is but too well known.'[169]

While growing developments in Wassa promised a future that included extensive coolie labour, Burton asserted that, 'the rest of the West African Coast is a luxuriant waste for

(London, 1974); A. J. Meagher, *The Coolie Trade, the Traffic in Chinese Labourers to Latin America 1847–1874*, (Bloomington, IN, 2008). Chapter 4 mentions the particular political conflict in the Witwatersrand surrounding the importation of Chinese labourers after the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, pp. 138-9. An estimated 60,000 Chinese labourers were working on the Rand between 1904 and 1906.

[167] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, ii, p. 333.

[168] Ibid., p43.

[169] 'Correspondence of R. F. Burton', *The Mining World and Engineering Record*, 17 March 1883, p. 283.

want of coolies'.[170] 'If we are to oust California', he explained, 'we must mend our manner of labour'.[171] They further declared: 'We must come, sooner or later, and the sooner the better, to a regular coolie-immigration, East African, Indian, and Chinese':[172]

> Suffice it to say that we can draw freely upon the labour-banks of Macáo, Bombay, and Zanzibar. The intelligent, thrifty, and industrious Chinese will learn mining here, as they have learnt it elsewhere, with the utmost readiness. The 'East Indian' will be well adapted for lighter work of the garden and the mines. Finally, the sturdy Swahili of the East African coast will do, as carriers and labourers, three times the work of Fantis and Apollonians.[173]

The productivity and work ethic of Asian labourers would benefit the mines directly. Their industriousness would also rub off on local African men over the course of time:

> The benefit of such an influx must not be measured merely by the additional work of a few thousand hands. It will at once create jealousy, competition, rivalry. It will teach by example — the only way of teaching Africans — that work is not ignoble, but that it is ignoble to earn a shilling and to live idle on three-pence a day till the pence are exhausted. Its advantages will presently be felt along the whole western coast, and men will wonder why it was not thought of before.[174]

Like many other European employers and officials, Burton and Cameron believed that Asian immigrants were the most sensible option to realise a cheaper and more disciplined labour force. They were hardly alone in their prejudice. Though the importation of Chinese indentured labour was not without its critique locally,[175] as early as 1882 there had been initial attempts to bring these labourers to other parts of West Africa on a large

[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, ii, p. 336–7.
[173] Ibid., 337.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Was the expansive employment of foreign indentured labour during the 1870s and 1880s an affront to surrounding populations, who also wanted to participate in the wage labour market, albeit at better wage rates and conditions? Did the employment of local men fit into a broader scheme of local social and economic development? Louis Gowan did describe Chinese labourers as 'pig-tailed cut-throats'. Louis F. Gowan (Feb. 1883) in 'Correspondence of R. F. Burton', *The Mining World and Engineering Record*, 28 April 1883, 425. He also asserted: 'I think it will be ruinous to employ Chinese labour'. Ibid. Kwabena Akruang-Parry, for one, has shown that the importation of Chinese labourers did cause a political backlash fuelled by African elites in colonial Ghana. K. O. Akurang-Parry, '"We Cast About for a Remedy"', 365–84.

scale.[176] Nevertheless, the crucial support that mining entrepreneurs in Wassa needed from the Gold Coast administration did not manifest itself until much later in the 1890s.

In 1896, William Edward Maxwell, Governor of the Gold Coast from 1895 to 1897, imagined a mining industry in which alluvial gold mining was conducted by miners who were 'more industrious and better instructed than the Gold Coast negro'.[177] This call was followed by multiple experiments in 1897, 1902, and again in 1914 to import Asian labour into colonial Ghana to serve in the gold mines on a large scale. Although the British public rarely responded positively to such trials, employers and administrators in the colony agreed that the Asian presence had the potential of driving economic development in large-scale farming as well as in mining by bringing a more skilled type of labourer to the Wassa region.

Around 30 Chinese labourers arrived on each of three occasions. Nonetheless, none of these experiments were successful.[178] Chinese indentured labourers might have been the more efficient employees but, as one missionary stationed in the Gold Coast asserted, the 'climate seems to be as deadly to the Oriental as it is to the European'.[179] Those brought to the Wassa mines succumbed to illness and disease. In spite of all the enthusiasm that guided the decision and that continued to exist for this option, the missionary concluded that 'only the African himself will ever be able to make available for the world the wealth which his country is ready to yield'.[180] Embarking on the

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[176] See, for example, D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850–1928* (Oxford, 1963), p. 24; Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*, pp. 21–2, 26; Akurang-Parry, '"We Cast About for a Remedy", 365–84.
[177] Ibid., 368.
[178] Ibid.
[179] G. G. Findlay, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (5 vols., Peterborough, 1921), iv, 150.
[180] Ibid.

extensive usage of African contract men on the Wassa gold fields was a 'choice' borne out of necessity, and not actively followed to expand the labour frontier in West Africa.

Liberian Contract Labourers

Following his visit to Tarkwa in 1889 Governor W. Brandford Griffith concluded that 'the natives of the country cannot, unfortunately, be relied upon to supply the necessary labour, which must come either from the Kroo country or from China'.[181] However, the Governor's advocacy for the Kru as disciplined labourers relied less on intuition than it did on historical precedent. Liberian labourers had already had a long history of wage-earning engagements with foreign employers along the coast of West Africa, as boatmen, carriers, and as general 'unskilled' labourers. Indeed, starting in 1816, British administrators in Sierra Leone had begun to promote the Kru Coast as a source for a reserve supply of wage labourers.[182] This social group's longstanding interaction with foreign employers on the coast was recorded in the nicknames that many of them had acquired over time, including 'Half-dollar', 'Cash', 'German-fast-boat', 'Newspaper', 'Pea-soup', 'Tom Peter', 'Broken-bottle', and 'Black-man-trouble', to mention a few.[183] A missionary in Ghana described how extensively interwoven the Kru had become in the fabric of foreign commerce in West Africa:

> Physically — though they are of rather low stature — they are probably the finest specimens of manhood in West Africa. They are to be met with almost everywhere along the west coast being the labourers of this part of the world. Every steamer trading at the ports takes on a crew of Khroo-boys to do the heavier work such as the handling of the cargo, while the ship is in tropical waters. All the trading houses employ them to roll the puncheons of palm oil and kernels from the bush to

[181] *Parliamentary Papers 1889*, No. 66 in [C 5620-24], p. 14.
[182] D. Frost, *Work and Community among West African Migrant Workers since the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool, 1999), p. 20.
[183] J. D. Russell, 'Pidgin-English amongst the Khroos', *Work and Workers in the Field* (1909), 206.

> the factories to the beach. In many of the towns they form the crews of the surfboats, which ply between the steamer.[184]

Many European employers viewed the Liberians as prototypical workers, the 'Irishmen' of West Africa, to use the words of Burton and Cameron.[185]

Most of the mining companies in Wassa required an average of 200 to 400 surface and underground labourers, and on almost all of these properties the African labour force consisted of a large contingent of Liberian workers of Kru, Grebo or Bassa origin, though most foreign employers could barely tell these groups apart.[186] Raymond Dumett has estimated that Liberian labourers comprised around 67 to 70 per cent of the overall labour force in Wassa during the first gold boom.[187] A certain readiness to travel long-distances for jobs had developed from their long history of wage earning. They were also often willing to work in an extended manner of around 12 months. A third factor that attracted employers in the mines to this group was their inclination to work underground without much fuss, whilst others, in particular Akan men, regarded underground mining as too dangerous and were reluctant to spend numerous hours on end in such a dark, damp, oppressive, and warm atmosphere with little more than a faint glow of a candle to orient themselves.[188] An additional reason why mine managers selected Liberia as a source for large-scale labour recruitment was because workers from the republic could generally be

[184] Russell, 'Pidgin-English amongst the Khroos', 206.
[185] Burton and Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, ii, pp. 333–4.
[186] British explorer and colonial administrator H. H. Johnston describes Basa men as part of the Kru race. H. H. Johnston, *Liberia* (2 vols., New York, 1906), ii, p. 943; CUL RCMS 139/10/3, No. 661/06.
[187] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, ch. 4–5, 7–8. According to Dumett, Kru labourers working on 12-month agreements had the highest ethnic representation in the gold mining industry before 1900. Yet only a few were becoming permanent wage labourers. Ibid., p. 225.
[188] In their later published travel log, Lady Decima Guggisberg and her husband, the colonial administrator Gordon Guggisberg, describe a tour underground at the Abbontiakoon Mine: 'The scene in these deep "levels" was strange and bewildering. The natives, naked but for a loin cloth, looked in the gloomy galleries like huge black demons as they toiled and sweated with pick and shovel at the ore around them, a faint flicker of light from the candles flashing occasionally from their white eyeballs, or shining from their white teeth. Indeed, I would often have stumbled headlong into a man if it had not been for those white teeth, gleaming like danger signals in the darkness'. Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, pp. 137–8.

recruited in large numbers within a short span of time with the help of local Akan labour recruiters. This system of indirect recruitment through headmen had already become a well-established system among Liberian labourers working along much of the coast of West Africa by the 1870s and 1880s. These intermediary figures who recruited men from within their own social groups and transported them to Wassa were responsible for the expansion of the gold mines' labour force into the 1930s, and even during the Second World War.[189]

In the existing scholarship headmen have been described as gaining authority from both a rural and urban sphere, though emphasis has been put on their dependence on the authority given to them by European employers.[190] Was this practice predominantly a foreign imposition? Or, is it possible that this system of bringing labourers to the gold mines grew out of the local economic and social conditions encountered by mining entrepreneurs in West Africa?

The Functions of Liberian Career Headmen

There is mention of headmen in the employment of British companies in West Africa dating back to the 1830s.[191] In his travel diaries published in 1841, Captain W. Allen of

[189] C. Lentz and V. Erlmann, 'A Working Class in Formation? Economic Crisis and Strategies of Survival among Dagara Mine Workers in Ghana', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 29 (1989), 97-98.
[190] Lentz and Erlmann are two of a select few scholars to have explored the emergence of headmen. In attempting to reconstruct the story of Chief Kweku, a former Dagara headman whose mining career in Wassa began in the 1910s, they noticed that, according to some African labourers, 'he was just appointed from above, by the white management, whereas others believed that it was a popular vote that brought him into office'. The authors went on to conclude: 'Be this as it may, as one widespread and probably the most credible version has it, Kweku's chieftaincy came first from the mines and all the Dagara agreed and accepted him as their chief'. Lentz and Erlmann, 'A Working Class in Formation?', 97.
[191] W. Allen, *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841* (2 vols., London, 1841), i, p. 30.

the Elder Dempster recalled the recruitment of Kru[192] labourers at Cape Palmas in Liberia, and on the Kru Coast in Sierra Leone, where this group had developed a small settlement from which they waited to be hired as members of crew, or in loading and discharging cargoes upon one of the various steamers passing through:

> One of the objects of our visit to [Sierra Leone], was to procure about one hundred Negroes, to be employed in various departments of the expedition. Of these the greater number were Krumen, to assist in the working of the vessels, and especially to save the white men from exposure to the sun and heavy rains. A considerable number of these men are always here waiting for employment; having, as it were, devoted themselves to the English; and both men-of-war and merchant ships take a gang on their arrival on the coast, for the purposes before mentioned.[193]

According to Allen, all male Kru at some point in their lives desired to have the experience of working aboard on one of these ships:

> The Krumen have for a long period been connected with our trade on the west coast of Africa, and areal most the only tribes who entertained such confidence in Englishmen as to trust themselves away from their homes, and for an indefinite time on board ship. This has now become so general among them — as the only way of acquiring riches — that nearly all the male population spend a shorter or longer term of probation, either in trade ships or in vessels of war.[194]

It was a popular ambition of Kru youths, who had lacked meaningful economic opportunities in Liberia or Sierra Leone, to eventually get involved in seafaring. The respect associated with this occupation and the lifestyle it allowed was visible in the Kru settlements. Uniforms and rank devices of deceased officers were acquired by Krumen who used them as items of prestige, and to re-enact the work routine aboard British military ships:

> [I]t is amusing to notice their variety of costume on particular occasions. Being always the highest bidders at the sale of deceased officers' effects, articles of uniform are purchased by them; and it is not unusual to see one with a post-captain's coat and epaulettes, surmounting a waistcloth; or another with a scanty fold of cotton round the middle, while his head and the lower extremities are severally encased in a cocked hat and pair of Wellington boots. The lucky possessors of such outward insignia of office, are fond of imitating the routine of a man-of-war, in Kru Town, by mustering at divisions, the officer of the watch, spy-glass in hand, reporting to the Captain, &c.

[192] Kru belongs to the language family of the larger Niger-Congo, which also includes the Bete, Dida, Grebo, Wobe peoples. Today it is mainly spoken in southeast Liberia and the Ivory Coast. Lynelle Marchese has suggested that the name Kru was actually derived from their activities as crew on foreign ships.
[193] Ibid., p. 77.
[194] Ibid.

> This produces emulation and a desire to serve on board ship, and to merit a " good book " or character.

What British observers interpreted as a game of dress up was most likely a show of power of richer Kru countrymen via the less fortunate. The headmen were the ones who carried the greatest amount of power in the workforce, as they decided who would get a job and who would not. Several decades after Allen's account, Liberian headmen also began to contribute to the expansion of the wage labour market around Wassa. They organised labourers for European employers in the gold mines in the capacity of 'career headmen' — distinguished in this study because of their 'career-mindedness' and because they relied on the capital and authorisation of mining firms in order to recruit.[195]

Along with other scholars, Crisp has also argued that for many mine managers in southwest Ghana, 'the easiest and most satisfactory, way of dealing with Africans' was through African authorities,[196] and there are indeed some pieces of information to indicate that headmen eliminated the search costs associated with finding, engaging, and managing wage labourers from other parts of West Africa. Instead of investing an excessive amount of time and energy in the recruitment and the development of direct relationships with the larger population of African workers, European employers often relied on establishing a good *rapport* with individual African headmen, who would

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195 Allen confirms that for the Kru headmen building a name for themselves was a central part of their agenda. 'It has not been considered necessary to give the Kroomen double pay, but to have the power of giving them better ratings than they usually have in men-of-war on the coast of Africa, to ensure getting the best description of men, as there will be no inducement of prize-money.' They had the foresight of wanting to find future employment with other European employers. Ibid., p. 494. Career headmen in Wassa also had to develop relations vis-a-vis European employers in order to be trusted enough to be allowed to pick good men independently and rack up a bill whilst bringing them to Ghana.

196 Dickinson (1939), in Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*, p. 69. For southern Nigeria, Brown has put forward that both 'the [colonial] state and the [colonial] industry used men whom they designated as local "leaders" to control their populations'. *'We Were All Slaves'*, p. 97. Brown had further contended that indirect recruitment through local African authorities 'was adopted under the assumption that requests […] would be accepted by their subjects who, it was alleged, were accustomed to serving their labor needs'. Ibid., p. 78.

ideally remain loyal to a single company whilst the larger population of African workers was in flux.[197]

Firstly, many headmen came with pre-established networks that gave them access to voluntary labour, but the function of such networks became most important in the screening of potential candidates. African labour recruiters took care of weeding out the weakest recruits, sparing foreign employers arduous and petty negotiations. Seamen like Captain Allen and his crew worked under the assumption that once a headman was engaged he became responsible for attracting, screening and hiring reliable 'unskilled' labourers.[198] Secondly, in the case of the Wassa mines it was significant that headmen took the lead in bringing labourers from distant locations. Furthermore, the transportation costs that this process involved were passed on to the labourers themselves. An administrator reported the unique manner in which Kru labourers were brought to Wassa:

> They are enlisted in their own country informally, and the agreement is properly drawn up under the Master and Servant Ordinance on their arrival in this colony. The manner of collecting is as follows. A headman already in work gets from his employer a note stating he is authorized to collect a gang of labourers. He proceeds with this to his own country.[199]

Liberian labourers commonly arrived at the port of Sekondi aboard a German steamer owned by either the Woermann Line or the German trader August Humplmayr.[200]

> [The headman] gets together about twenty-five natives of his own district with whom he goes onboard a steamer, usually a German one.[201]

[197] For the nineteenth century, Dumett contends that the employment of these groups and other independent labourers lasted for such a long time because 'it was convenient and because the village mining groups under headmen and [chiefs] retained a commitment to the company, even though individuals may come and go'. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 225.
[198] See, Allen, *A Narrative of the Expedition,* p. 78.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Next to the Elder Dempster, the Woermann Line, which was founded in 1885, dominated the trade between West Africa and Europe until the period of the Second World War. The line was the reportedly largest employer in Liberian shipping by the late 1920s.
[201] CUL RCMS 139/10/3, No. 661/06.

Upon arrival at Sekondi the employer or a representative reimbursed the captain for the exports fees that he had passed on to the Liberian Government beforehand, as well as for the labourers' passage fees:[202]

> On arrival at their destination the captain of the vessel calls upon the employer or his agent with a bill of charges for fares and for the head money paid by him to the Liberian Government prior to his sailing with the labourers.[203]

Interestingly, it was only at this point that the labourers found out how much they would be earning during their service in Wassa.

> On being handed over to their employer they are informed of their rate of pay which varies with their apparent ability, and is usually reckoned at so much a month and not so much a day an important distinction and one that is the pivot of numerous labour troubles. Their term of service is almost invariably one year.[204]

It was convenient that transportation costs could be built into these calculations, leading to an adjustment in the men's monthly earnings. As one colonial official explained, 'the cost of the steamer and the head money [for the Liberian government] is usually and properly paid by the employer; sometimes however, it is deducted from the men's wages'.[205]

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[202] The form of authorisation that headmen were required to show before recruiting also confirmed that a given company would later cover transportation costs. This indicates that Liberian headmen did not have access to any cash in hand when they recruited.

[203] Ibid. Also, the following account indicates that Kru labourers were not always informed about the destination of their new workplace in advance either: 'A curious incident took place in 1858. The French ship, Regina Coeli, arrived on the Kru Coast, and the Captain treated with Kru chiefs for men to be shipped as laborers; the men supposed that they were shipped for a trip along the west coast, as usual, to serve as seamen; learning, however, that their destination was the West Indies, they became alarmed and believed that they were to be sold into slavery; the captain was still on shore, treating with the chiefs; the men mutinied, seized the ship, and killed all the white crew except the doctor; they then returned to shore and left the ship without a crew ; had she not been noticed by a passing English steamer, she would no doubt have been wrecked; she was taken into a Liberian port.' F. Starr, *Liberia: Description, History, Problems* (Chicago, 1913), p. 91.

[204] Ibid.

[205] CUL RCMS 139/10/3, No. 661/06. Head money had to be paid to colonial authorities in most West African colonies around this period. D. Frost, *Work and Community among West African Migrant Workers since the Nineteenth Century*, p. 17.

Mine managers in Wassa also benefited from the skills that headmen passed on to inexperienced recruits, since they had already been indoctrinated in life and work in the mines.[206] Their employment for managerial services also enabled mine companies to avoid an expansion of the white labour force, which was considered to be particularly expensive in West Africa. For as much as the superiority of white management was propagated among entrepreneurs, officials, and private citizens, the notion of a large number of white men at all levels of management clashed with the financial outlook of the mining sector.[207] There was broad consensus over the benefits of respectable foreign managers. Nevertheless, economic considerations for cutting labour expenditures were even more important. Africans, regardless of their stature in the mining hierarchy, worked for a fraction of a European's wage. However, that 'White labor must be paid, and paid well', was an apprehension of more than one colonial commentator.[208]

To secure competent miners from Britain, the United States, or Australia, employers had to outbid wages offered on other gold fields around the globe. The extent

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[206] Headmen were esteemed figures in the home region, amongst other things, because of their acquaintance with the migratory process.

[207] For example, in 1909 the British miner W. J. Loring who had worked in Wassa contended that 'under good management an improvement can be effected [in the African labour force] and the standard raised', though as chapter 4 demonstrates his opinion may have been shaped by larger political debates on the nature and extent of white settlement in British colonies. 'The West African Outlook', *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 3 August 1909, 8; F. W. H. Migeod of the Government Transport Department also contended that 'the value of a gang of labourers varies with the ability of the European in charge […] One will condemn a gang as worthless, while another will get most excellent result out of it. Probably under efficient supervision, or if possible working on a fair system of daily task work, a day's work will be performed that will for the expenditure compare favourably with that of an unskilled labour in other countries'. RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 5. Around 1905, a British traveller through Tarkwa in 1905 also believed in the potential of the African worker, who 'is certainly cunning, imaginative of injury, and indisposed to physical exertion, but when properly treated and led by men who understand him, his working power compares more than favourably with that of other native races'. The men who understood African workers were generally not understood to be African themselves. Instead, referencing the responsibilities of the European management, she continued: 'He wants a firm but just hand, and, above all, he wants to respect his employer'. Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, pp. 121–2. This sentiment was again shared by a white miner who had worked in Tarkwa over several years: 'It is not always easy to manage white labour, but to keep the blacks up to the mark even more experience and tact are required'. 'The West African Outlook', 8.

[208] 'The Goldfields of the West Coast of Africa', *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 1 March 1902, 25.

to which this occurred shows that gold mines in Wassa were at a clear disadvantage in this bargain. A visitor to Ghana reported that after signing a contract with a West African mining firm white miners received 'more money in their pockets than they had ever had before in their lives'.[209] Attractive benefit packages accompanied these impressive salaries. White miners were able to negotiate large salaries and benefits on grounds of the unpopularity of the location. With most men preferring to avoid the region that had earned the chilling title of the 'White Man's Grave', there was even gossip that desperate mining companies gave white miners 'advances of pay, sometimes even guaranteed their bar bill' during the passage to West Africa.[210]

The sensationalisation of the state of health in West Africa in the press was an important obstacle to the recruitment of affordable or cheap white miners:

> The country had an evil reputation for fever and death, so these men in the low state of the labour market which existed at the time, made most absurdly good — terms for themselves with the companies at home. I've seen rough workmen, who had no more skilled knowledge of gold-mining than what they had acquired as colliers or tin miners at home, coming out to direct work requiring great technical knowledge, drawing £60 to £40 a month with food found, and […] first-class passages provided.[211]

Companies were forced to pay enough to lower the risk aversion of foreign men, placing even those with mediocre mining skills in an advantageous bargaining position. Even once they did manage to recruit men from Britain, Australia, or America mine managers in Wassa complained about having lower productivity levels as compared to other gold fields. It cannot be said with any certainty whether this was due to the frequent employment of less qualified men, or if environmental and health issues were to blame.

[209] Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West* Africa, p. 8.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.

Either way, one mining entrepreneur complained that entering into labour contracts, 'with Europeans, is most unsatisfactory to the manager'.[212]

> From 10 to 15 per cent, more officials are needed to do the same work here than in other places'.[213]

Although the overall quality of white miners may have improved between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the majority of them were still judged as largely 'incompetent' in terms of output when considered in comparison to other mining centres.[214]

One factor driving such assessments was the real consequences of health conditions in West Africa. The few hundred white men working on a given gold mine in Wassa were frequently unable to work at the same pace as their mining colleagues in other parts of the world, 'not on account of holidays, but on account of sickness'.[215] The harshness of the rural environment around Tarkwa, a district described as being situated 'in the midst of a dense, damp, and malarious [*sic*] forest', was difficult for any foreigner to handle.[216] According to the Australian surveyor W. L. Crompton,

> The continual high moist temperature is in itself a severe strain on ones nervous system, being so utterly cut off from outside help makes it worse, and the extreme suddenness of disease here makes it unwise to contemplate illness, yet, at the same time any carelessness lets you know at once that malaria is always lying low for you.[217]

One mining agent complained that the 'indirect losses, due to decreased vitality, is preventing the best engineering talent from seeking a career in West Africa, and in frequent changes of staff, are difficult to assess in terms of pennyweights, but they are

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212 'The Goldfields of the West Coast of Africa', 25.
213 Ibid.
214 Loring, 'The West African Outlook'.
215 'The Goldfields of the West Coast of Africa', 25.
216 For example, a report by the District Commissioner on the movement of people in and out of Tarkwa stated: 'Mr. Criswick, manager of Gold Coast Company, went home sick on the 25th March. The doctor of the French company died this month. Another European belonging to same company was sent down, and died on board. Captain Burton sailed for England beginning of the month. He came as far as Tomento, but became ill and had to go back. The manager [of] "Effuenta Company" went home sick at the same time. Commander Cameron sailed for England on the 23rd instant'. *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure in No. 3 in [C 3687], p. 10: 'First Monthly Report on Tarquah Gold Mining District'.
217 'The Goldfields of the West Coast of Africa', 25.

considerable'.[218] The amount of money lost on white labour due to illness and recovery improved slightly between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,[219] however, management continued to struggle with local environmental conditions. In 1901 the director of a local mine notified shareholders of the endemic state of affairs among white labour:

> A certain proportion of the men are laid up for a few days or a week at a time with a mild form of malarial fever, and that it no doubt likely to continue, though we hope now that we have sufficient capital and can afford to do more clearing work and to build better houses and provide better living for the men, that there will be an improvement in the health of the mining camps.

It was widely accepted that if a mining company hired eight workers, it would lose 'on a rule thirty-eight days [of work] a month':[220]

> Government officials have twelve months' work, six months' holidays on full pay, they live largely on the coast and have good bungalows. Miners must live in the dense bush and swamps in the interior without good bungalows, often tents only.[221]

The health factor had a startling impact on labour expenditures:

> The worst that can happen to us, looking at it from £ s. d. point of view, is that we shall have to spend 25 per cent more on our white staff. […] Well, 25 per cent added to the cost of white labour means 6 ½ added to the total cost of raising and milling the ore. That is the worst that we have to expect from the climate […].[222]

Yet, directors and managers tried to downplay the dilemma as much as possible. The prevention of illness only encouraged further disruptions in management.

To keep their men in a good state of health, prominent companies like Abbontiakoon and Adjah Bippo relied on rotating field management.[223] White workers, from common miners up to senior management, generally only worked on an annual basis in administrative jobs in accounting, or technical jobs such as surveying. Out of the

[218] 'West African Mining', 322.
[219] Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, p. 127.
[220] 'The Goldfields of the West Coast of Africa', 25.
[221] Ibid.
[222] 'Fanti Consolidated Mines, Limited', *The Economist*, 16 February 1901, 249.
[223] Ibid.

12 months during which managers and miners were engaged, they actually spent only around eight to nine months in West Africa.[224] The last third of the year was spent back home recovering from the effects of the climate.[225] White management was not much more than a 'thin white line', which relied on African intermediaries in order to function. For example, in 1906, for the daily average of 540 European labourers employed by the mining and dredging companies, in Wassa and the Ashanti region, there were 14,760 Africans employed.[226] A similar ratio continued to be maintained in years for which such data is available between 1900 and 1918.[227] In 1905 the overall ratio of European to African staff in the Wassa gold mines was little improved at 1 to 24.7.[228] In Tarkwa specifically the ratio was about 1 to 18 for that same year.[229]

In reality, for every 200 to 400 Africans labouring underground in the extraction and hauling of ore, or in surface mining across the various mills spread across a concession, or in the forests, there were around two white mine captains who worked under the direction of a Chief mine captain. The surveillance of individual gangs of African labourers was largely left to their headman. Once they were taken on by a particular concession they were excluded from the drudgery of manual labour. Now they became responsible for recruitment and later the training of the members of their gangs.[230] Though individual contracts under the Master and Servant Ordinance were introduced in the 1890s for Kru labourers, this did not lighten the burden of controlling

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[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Statistics relating to European and African labour employed in the mines from 1900 to 1918 can be found in Appendix 2. 1.
[227] Ibid.
[228] PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, s. 14.
[229] Appendix 2. 2.
[230] Chapter 4 shows that this exemption from manual labour was written into the contracts of headmen hired through the Government Transport Department.

the labour force by much. Mine managers still struggled to get a precise overview of the individuals in their employ at a given time in a given place, and the difficulties of labour supervision grew proportionately with the number of African contract men put to work. This problem would not improve over time either, given frequent and widespread turnover in African labourers on an annual or half-yearly basis. In 1905 in neighbouring Asante, for example, a mine manager noticed to his own despair that 'there was a much larger number of natives employed [there] than [they] had any idea of owing to the system of contracts whereby only one name appeared on the books'.[231] Headmen were therefore encouraged to regulate low-level legal disputes between their recruits. Beyond mediating them, they were also allowed to exact small fines.[232] In cases of desertion, as well, career headmen were the first in line to search for and to collect runaways.[233]

The language barrier was an added obstacle that few European officials, let alone individuals in the private sectors, had the time or will to cross. For while in the offices and courts, for example, European employers often relied on educated African middlemen, who sometimes spoke multiple European languages as well as indigenous ones, the diversity of the concerned population was multiplied in the context of the urbanising mines. Therefore, employers required that headmen 'must know [a] little English'.[234] Wages, too, were given to them to be passed on to the members of the gangs.

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[231] LMA MS14171, vol. 11, 10 January 1905, pp. 48–54: 'Report by C. W. Mann to Directors of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation',

[232] Chapter 4 shows that headmen employed by the Government Transport Department were allowed to levy fines 'seldom exceeding five shilling' for anything from unfinished work to nuisance disturbances. CUL RCMS 139/12/10, 'Transport Circular No. 3'.

[233] After the Anfargah mutiny, as it was referred to in official correspondence, several workers returned of their own volition. The headman was sent to 'collect some more of them on the road'. CUL RCMS 139/4/30.

[234] CUL RCMS 139/11/8, Transport Circular No. 4.

Looked at from an ideological and cultural perspective, the maintenance of 'tribal authority' also potentially fit into contemporary European notions about African society, in particular in reference to how African labourers ought to be treated as submissive subjects. In looking at company records from this period, it quickly becomes apparent that mine management reinforced the organisation of migrant workers along ethnic, rather than occupational lines. It also cannot be denied that the bureaucratic structure of the mines supported ethnic classifications in various ways. 'Tribal'-orientation became central to European perception, organisation and treatment of African workers in the mines. Their usage of these categories on an official level served to ingrain such categories not only into the social, but also the professional lives of African labourers. Administrators leaned on ethnic identity as a predictor of a social group's 'value', physical strength, and general loyalty.[235] In summary, they assigned material value to African workers based on their reported ethnic background. The ways in which labourers self-identified became a variable in the attainment of wage work in mining centres. Their potential wage rates could also be affected by their social background. Another driving force behind 'colonial ethnicisation' in the urbanising mining centres, as well as a stabilizer of these relationships, was the introduction of institutions of purportedly precolonial origin, to which Europeans believed Africans would adhere.[236] Housing, for example, was organised along the lines of social background, as evident in the names of the various towns, such as 'Lagos village', the Hausa zongo,[237] and the Jato *zongo*, etc. Some of these areas even came to possess elected institutions, such as a 'native council'

[235] CUL RCMS 139/11/8, 'Transport Circular'.
[236] Cooper calls this ideology 'a central tenet of the policy of Indirect Rule', Cooper, 'African Workers and Imperial Design', p. 299.
[237] *Zongo* is a Hausa term often used to describe the settlements of foreigners in coastal towns.

and an ‘ethnic presidency’ by the turn of the century.[238] The prevalence of headmen in the mines conforms to a ‘tribal’ outlook on African society and workers. Concurrently, as shown by the financial and social side of the headship system, there were also evident continuities from older times embedded in the labour mobilisation strategies of headmen, which speak against the notion of headship as a European ‘invention’.

Fig. 2. Kru Headman on the Gold Coast around 1876–1877

Source: CUL RCMS 139/12/35

[238] LMA MS14171, vol. 1, D. 366: ‘A.D. Wilson—Native Interpreter’, 7 June 1902.

To continue with the debate in terms of cultural history, it is important to note that, although part of the construction and articulation of ethnic identity was stimulated by structural and administrative pressures, part of this drive also came from within the various social groups themselves. For these young male migrant labourers, life in a cosmopolitan area was both invigorating and terrifying, and ethnicity could hold the key both to their empowerment and their disempowerment. Reflecting transformations that were happening in the broader political landscape, ethnicity gave labourers the tools for self-improvement; for acquiring new liberties and powers relative to other social groups.[239] These 'new political structures, rituals and discourses were attractive […] to migrant workers […] who sought the same status and respect as colleagues […] from precolonial kingdoms'.[240] In spite of historical tensions and competition, groups from different localities encountered one another on more or less equal standing in the urbanising mining centres.[241] In other words, for many colonial ethnicisation was an attractive category precisely because it produced 'new forms of classification and self-understanding which differed considerably from precolonial models of belonging', and African labourers were eager to capitalise on this new form of differentiation.[242] The eager adoption of ethnic identity by Africans themselves was a particularly significant development, since for many of these groups ethnicity had not been of any significance during the precolonial period.[243] There was power in such an adoption, as it allowed historically disadvantaged groups 'a certain degree of "progress" in the colonial

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[239] According to Lentz, in colonial Ghana this transformation within migrant populations paralleled changes within broader society. C. Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 2–3. Idem, Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa (Bloomington, IN, 2013).
[240] Ibid., p. 34.
[241] Ibid., p. 34.
[242] Ibid., p. 7.
[243] Ibid., pp. 1, 7; idem, 'Colonial Constructions and African Initiatives: The History of Ethnicity in Northwestern Ghana', *Ethnos*, 65 (2001), 107–36.

context'.[244] There were immediate benefits in this new statehood in the context of the mining villages. Among other guarantees, all workers, regardless of their social origin and background, now received (almost) equal pay for equal work. Moreover, they all had access to similar legal rights, at least in theory. Thus, migrant men established affiliations to serve and to protect self-interest along lines that were not occupational, but 'often containing ethnic overtones, that emphasised ties extending beyond the boundaries of the […] home village'.[245] They imposed these classifications on themselves by congregating with others with whom they shared commonalities, such as language, regional origin, or descent. Social boundaries in the mines thus often cut across narrower group identities back home.

It has been put forward in the existing literature on 'traditional' authorities in 'modern' commerce that headmen were an important bridge between 'traditional' and 'modern' employment relations by providing duties to their gangs that served to lighten the transition from their rural home to the urban mining centre.[246] Some scholars even affirm that, even more important than the authority that headmen achieved through their relations with mine management, was their ability to fulfil indigenous notions of authority. 'Traditional' leaders in the mining centres built upon these linkages to their common home region. Whether the 'native council', the 'ethnic presidency', or their headmen, all of these authorities continued to use older forms of understanding to organise themselves, though claims in this regard should not be over-emphasised. Although the dominant literature on recruitment for colonial mines points to the use of

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244 Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana*, p. 34.
245 Ibid., p. 2.
246 Lentz and Erlmann, 'A Working Class in Formation?', 95; Lentz, 'The Chief, the Mine Captain and the Politician', 64, 92.

political power as a means of coercing men into the labour force, the evidence presented in Chapter 1 demonstrates that there was little precedent for domination alone as a reasonable way to get individuals to work.

There can be no rebuttal to the observation that the headman and the members of his gang were not equals, or brothers. Certainly, the recruits chosen to engage in the tasks of drudgery and menial labour obviously held a different economic and social status as compared to their recruiter. Distinctions between a headman and his labourers were evident and even visible in dress. The headman was usually dressed in Western clothing: cotton T-shirt, full-length trousers, and cloth-cap so typical of a contemporary industrial worker. Typical 'unskilled' workers, in turn, were still sighted in loincloths and traditional cloth-garb. In addition, the responsibilities of headmen when working for European employers were strictly delineated, and discipline was an important task that they had to carry out. Indeed, according to Captain Allen of the Elder Dempster, discipline was one of the most important duties carried out by the headman:

> Every gang of Krumen or Fishmen has, therefore, one or more headmen, according to its numbers, who interpret the orders and see them properly executed. These superiors can alone punish the people under their care, which they do with right good will when it is necessary. Even on board vessels of war, they are not allowed to be punished by white men, as such a proceeding would be so offensive to either tribe, that they would probably desert in a body.[247]

Yet, discipline was only one of a succession of responsibilities. It was offset by other activities and provisions to help the labourers. Mine managers noted that the headman was not only a disciplinarian and supervisor, but also educator and welfare agent. For example, the authority of the headmen depended on his being able to pass on professional skills and general knowledge about this new work environment. He also stood as the ethnic broker of the members of his gang in the new work and living space. In addition to

[247] Allen, *A Narrative of the Expedition,* pp. 122-3.

voicing the opinions and grievances of the labourers in moments of occupational discontent, the headman also had to iron out tensions with other social groups in and around the mining centres. Men hired to the mines without such a representative found themselves in a precarious situation; as reiterated in the following statement by an administrative official, such networks were essential to survival in the mining village:

> If a man did not get food he could not work, and if he were a foreigner and without friends to help him on the particular mine where he was, he must go and steal to keep himself alive. I have had to put this very plainly to several mine managers, who, not knowing the country, did not recognize that their labourers were drawn from numerous tribes who would not sympathize with each other if in trouble.[248]

Lentz and Erlmann have pointed out that labourers also depended on their headmen for provision of accommodation.[249]

As already mentioned, the headman was also responsible for the welfare of the men whom he hired. For example, he was expected to take care of men who had fallen ill.[250] Sickness was not a reasonable cause to fire or to replace a worker, and doing so was an offence that carried serious risks. The following letter, written by a headman in response to an employer's accusation that he had fired one of his recruits while the former was ill, exemplifies that not 'taking care of your sick' could quickly land a headman a bad reputation with European employers, and perhaps threaten his chances of being engaged in the future:

> In reply I beg to state, that I was very much surprised to hear that a sick boy went to you and complained to you that I had driven him from my premises and that I am not care of my sick, except when they are in position, and that I had driven two sick boys from my premises before, and after that if I had done so, you will soon dispense with my services.[251]

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[248] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 5.
[249] Lentz and Erlmann, 'A Working Class in Formation?', 102.
[250] Diane Frost points out that around this period Kru seamen working under contract each deposited one shilling per working day with their headman, who, in turn, would deposit the money with a bank. This communal fund, the 'Kru Fund', was only to be spent in order to support colleagues in times of illness, hardship, or death, or to educate the offspring of poor labourers. Frost, *Work and Community among West African Migrant Workers since the Nineteenth Century*, p. 42.
[251] CUL RCMS 139/16, Letter No. 3.

In order to justify his actions, and most importantly not to lose his job, the headman went on to denigrate the labourer called Supply, who had made the complaint, as being lazy and deceitful. In spite of the occasional fallibility of some, most headmen seem to have regarded welfare as a necessary part of the job.

Nevertheless, political power alone did not define the relationship between recruiter and recruit. Given that the headman had to 'fulfil the goals and concerns of his people',[252] an indigenous economic institution informed this power structure. In other words, headship was also reinforced by monetary relations. A fundamental way in which headmen accessed the labour of others, as in older times, was through economic opportunity and protection. He provided debt protection to his recruits. Moreover, as the next chapter will discuss in greater detail, credit given to labourers that freed them from financial obligations back home were often a prerequisite to getting a recruit to agree to an extended contract.

Although the 'headman' has thus far been analysed in this singular professional category of 'career headman', the chapters that follow present evidence for an emergence of different types of headmen around the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, over whom European employers had far less direct influence. The dependence of career headmen on the capital and authorisation of mining companies in order to recruit will be contrasted with the business activities of independent headmen who used their own capital to bring men to the gold mines in response to commercial opportunities in Wassa, as examined in Chapter 5.[253]

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[252] Brown, *'We Were All Slaves'*, p. 58.

[253] Though Dumett has posited that raises and advances to recruit wage earners were only offered on an 'ad hoc' and irregular basis in the mining sector between the 1870s and 1890s, and that such offers were diminished or eliminated altogether with later recruits, nevertheless, the records for the second gold boom

To summarise, while the first chapter has indicated that European colonialism continued to depend on African intermediaries to contribute to economic development, the most prevalent African intermediary assisting the mechanised mines in Wassa was the headman. Career headmen were widely engaged in the organisation of unskilled African contract labourers from the very advent of the 'industry'. These figures carried out the orders of mine management, on the one hand. On the other hand, they worked towards meeting the demands of their recruits. In order to access another individual's labour power over time, they had to draw on older patterns of employment; a client-patron relationship which included social as well as economic elements. Though career headmen are most easily identifiable as externally-imposed products of the expansion of international capital, that is 'invented', the emergence of other more powerful headmen complicates the picture.

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indicate that a competitive advance system continued to pose a challenge to local entrepreneurs struggling to lower wage expenditures. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 226–9.

Appendix Chapter 2

2. 1. STATISTICS RELATING TO LABOUR EMPLOYED IN THE MINES 1900 TO 1918

	Average number of African labourers employed daily by the Mining and Dredging Companies	Average number European Labourers employed daily by the Mining and Dredging Companies	Overall number of European Residents Mining Companies employed by the Mining and Dredging Companies
1900	-	-	-
1901	-	-	-
1902	-	-	1048
1903	-	-	1222
1904	17,044	611	1157
1905	12,465	504	1,911
1906	14,760	540	992
1907	15,277	-	-
1908	15,796	-	759
1909	15,895	-	585
1910	19,138*	-	-
1911	19,153*	-	922
1912	17,633*	-	953
1913	15,658*	-	928
1914	15,741*	-	1020
1915	15,300 *	-	481
1916	15,296	-	637
1917	16,004	415	714
1918	13,918	336	578

Source: Gold Coast Departmental Reports.

*includes European

- No Data Available

2. 2. LABOUR EMPLOYED IN THE MINING INDUSTRY IN 1905

District	Surface		Underground		Total	
	European	African	European	African	European	African
Tarkwa	147	3,002	95	1,383	242	4,385
Prestea to Bogosu	49	1,953	21	500	70	2,452
Sefwhi to Denkera	34	1,740	8	506	42	2,246
Ashanti	74	1,980	42	1,148	116	3,128
Dredging Companies	34	253	-	-	34	253
TOTAL	338	8,928	166	3,537	504	12,465

Source: PRO CO 98/14, Enclosure in Gold Coast No. 175, p. 14: Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, 9 April 1906.

CHAPTER 3. The 'Jungle' Boom in Wassa of 1900 to 1905: Ghana's Moment in the Imperial Rush for Gold and the Restrictions of Kru Labour Exports

As noted in the previous chapter, during the nineteenth century a class of adventurous prospectors with weak management skills, and little scientific expertise, opened the gold mining frontier in Wassa. They extensively incorporated Liberian career headmen into the mining hierarchy for the recruitment, management, and welfare of recruited gangs of African labourers; an appropriation of indigenous clientage relationships. Both these situations changed with the start of the second gold boom in 1900. The influx of South African mining capital and men is documented in a multitude of company records and mining journals. They brought with them improved technology and managerial skills. However, the need for labourers persisted, as did a dependence on indirect recruitment as the most influential tool for bringing men to the mines. Following restrictions on Kru labour exports, mine managers in Wassa had to collaborate with headmen from other parts of West Africa. District court records from Tarkwa reveal the demographic diversification of indirect recruitment, as well as the intricacies of the cash advance system used to lure men and tie them to a specific company for around six to twelve months.

The 1890s presented a meaningful turning point for the Wassa gold fields, both in terms of the policy and the practice of development affecting the mines. Though Britain's interest in her West African colonies remained primarily political in nature, an era of expansionist developmental imperialism was emerging. Staff changes in the Colonial Office and colonial state allowed for British officials and private entrepreneurs to have a more coherent outlook on the issue of economic progress.[254] The appointment of a new Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, in 1895 was one factor initiating this shift. Chamberlain was determined to bring the colonies to a new stage of social and economic development with the backing of public funds from the British Imperial Government.[255] He coordinated capital investments into infrastructural projects and scientific knowledge to support foreign and indigenous commerce.[256] Adding to this zeal were the interests of the sitting governor W. Brandford Griffith, who also happened to be an enthusiast of such 'progressive' development policies.[257] Under Griffith's direction a variety of programmes were initiated to grow the economy, with the Government railway system likely having the greatest transformative effect, both for 'modern' and indigenous commerce.

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[254] Guided by a policy of economic self-sufficiency and *laissez-faire* in its West African colonies during the 1870s and 1880s, British officials did not take upon themselves any direct blame for the failure of the nineteenth-century mining sector. When Colonial Secretary Henry Holland discussed the Wassa gold mines in 1889 he only named hindrances of environmental, infrastructural, social, and professional origin, leaving out entirely the role of government: 'Great obstacles have had to be encountered in the past: climate, absence of means of communication with the coast, solitude and difficulty of transport, while absence of the requisite knowledge of native character and physical strength, or of natural ingenuity and resource in overcoming the thousand and one little hindrances to progress which arise here, in themselves would serve to check the progress of the strongest and best-intentioned man, and tend towards over-indulgence in liquor, which has been the ruin of many a man in this colony'. *Parliamentary Papers 1889*, No. 66 in [C 5620-24], p. 10.

[255] Hopkins has argued against an overemphasis on Chamberlain's policies, showing that they were only effective due to the evolution of the broader political sphere in Britain, wherein both liberal and conservatives acknowledged that in order for Britain to maintain its sphere of influence in West Africa a more active engagement with the colonies was necessary. Hopkins, 'The New Economic History of Africa', 162, 164. One of Chamberlain's strategies was to raise enthusiasm for public investment in Empire among the working classes who struggled with high rates of unemployment during this period. P. T. Marsh, 'Chamberlain, Joseph (1836–1914)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., January 2011 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32350, accessed on 11 March 2011].

[256] R. Dumett, 'Obstacles to Government-Assisted Agricultural Development in West Africa: Cotton-Growing Experimentation in Ghana in the Early Twentieth Century', *Agricultural History Review*, 23 (1975), 159.

[257] W. Brandford Griffith had maintained a favourable outlook on mechanised mining. Following a visit to the Wassa gold fields in 1889, the governor expressed how impressed he was by the manner in which the mining industry was now being managed. He also believed that the area was 'rich in gold' and that it was 'merely a matter of the necessary time and scientific application for that gold to pay well for extraction', *Parliamentary Papers 1889*, No. 66 in [C 5620-24], p. 14.

The delayed construction of the railway had been a source of grievance for mining companies and local merchants for several years by the turn of the century, and its belated construction opened up a new stage in the commercial process by connecting remote markets in Ghana with the coast. Railway tracks ran between Takoradi and the rural mining towns in the southwest, reaching Tarkwa in 1901, Obuasi in 1902, Kumasi in 1903, and Prestea in 1910.[258] Finally there was some relief from the uncertainties and costs of head porterage, which was previously the norm in the forest zones because endemic sleep sickness prevented the use of beasts of burden. Of greatest significance for the Wassa gold mines, heavy machinery could now be more effectively transported, as could supply goods, staff, and goods for trade and consumption. Added to this change in economic policy were forces targeting mining development specifically.

The second gold boom occurred during a period of political stabilisation in the region, when the South African Rand gold rush of the second half of the 1880s was becoming impeded by the political disruption of the South African War (the Anglo-Boer War). Incidentally, this was a time when the gold rush of Western Australia of the 1890s was proving to be economically volatile. The British defeat of the Asante Empire in 1901 was also a critical event for local trade and production.

Whilst mining had not come to a standstill during this final conflict, production in Wassa had been in constant peril. The Asante had attacked mining camps during past wars and any news of potential future attacks was often enough to get labourers to desert

[258] The 1902 census for the Gold Coast Colony and its protectorates attributed the increase in white men in the colony to two factors: a) the ‘great’ development of the mining industry; and b) the construction of the Sekondi-Tarkwa Railway. RHO MS 722.12 s.1, p. 4.

the area without notice.[259] The unease among managers and staff stemming from the vagaries of the conflict was ended with the conclusion of the violence, and investors could reconsider their reluctant involvement in Wassa.

As aforementioned, a significant portion of the capital entering Wassa during the second gold boom was meant to be allocated to more developed industries. Firstly, local gold mines were able to capitalise on gold mining slumps in Australia. The stock market in West Australian gold mining was proving to be quite unpredictable, and in consequence it scared away a significant amount of investors. A second and even more significant factor was the Anglo-Boer war of 1899 to 1902, which closed the gold mines of South Africa on the Witwatersrand. European bankers and financiers were already looking for new ways to exploit the precious metal for a profit and the suggestion that the gold reefs in Wassa resembled those of the Transvaal had been recently affirmed by multiple sources, including scientists, promoters, and colonial agents. The reefs in Wassa showed the formation of banket just as they were known to occur on the Rand and nowhere else at this time. Actually, when several engineers from the Transvaal visited Tarkwa in 1900, they announced that the reefs of quartz in the area were of a similar, if not better, grade than deposits in South Africa.[260] Wassa rapidly earned the title of 'the Johannesburg of West Africa'[261] and all promotions of West African mining hinged on this single notion for the next decade.[262]

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[259] During the war against Asante, the manager of the Effuenta Gold Mines Company, the educated African Paulus Dahse, wrote to District Commissioner Firminger of Axim to enquire about the advances of the Asante army in Wassa. The manager reported that his entire Kru staff had recently abandoned the camps after they became aware of threat. PRAAD ADM 11/1/845, No. 31/1923, District Commissioner's Tours in Outlying Portions of Tarquah District.
[260] Szereszewski, *Structural Changes in the Economy of Ghana, 1891–1911*, p. 38.
[261] Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, i, p. 99.
[262] In 1909 a contemporary mining journal claimed that the 'Taquah banket is comparable in point of regularity and gold content to some of the best portions of the Rand'. 'West African Mining', 322. In 1910

As the price of gold rose on the world market, and neither the Rand nor West Australia were showing much hope of recovery, many foreign investors looked to Wassa to bring stability to the market, and by the end of 1900 mining development in southwest Ghana was in full swing once again. The mood was highly optimistic.[263] Suddenly the name 'Tarkwa' was being mentioned in the same breath as Kimberley, The Kaudt, Bulawayo, Ashanti, Klondike, Nome, Cripple Creek, Kalgoorlie, Broken Hill, Wyalong, Mambare, Croydon, The Towers, Palmer, Raub, Sumatra, and the Punjab, as well as other sites of recent hopeful mineral rushes.

3. 1. The Arrival of South African Mining Capital

There was a multiplication of mining companies in Wassa at the turn of the twentieth century, in addition to a core of roughly 40 mines that had survived the 1880s.[264] Between 1900 and 1905 approximately four hundred companies were registered in the towns of Tarwka, Tamsu, and Abosso, though not all became productive.[265] Already in the 12 months between September 1900 and 1901, over 170 companies were formed with a nominal capital of £24,000,000 and a share capital of around £4,000,000; a

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the British entrepreneur James Herbert Curle who had ties to South Africa contended that, 'The Taquah goldfield is a bed of conglomerate sufficiently like the Rand ore to be called "banket" So far as known it is 22 miles long; the average width of clean ore from end to end is probably not less than 40 inches, and its persistence in depth has been well proved by boreholes. The bed carries gold throughout; but it is reasonably certain that much of it is too poor to work. I make this statement on the evidence of all development work to date and the results of some 50 or more boreholes. The richer zones appear more clearly defined than on the Rand, and evidence is favourable to their persistence in depth. These richer zones have been found, so far, in Taquah, Abosso, Cinnamon Bippo, Abbontiakoon, and Wassau; there is also reason to take a hopeful view of the ore in Fanti Mines and Gold Coast Amalgamated. This Taquah goldfield has the makings of a big industry, and my idea is that at least one-third of this bed can be regarded as profitable'. J. H. Curle, 'West African Mines', *Mining Journal* (1), 44.

[263] Appendix 3. 1.

[264] Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*, p. 21.

[265] G. K. Allen, 'Gold Mining in Ghana', *African Affairs*, 57 (1958), 224.

considerable amount, yet still a fraction of what was spent on other mineral fields.[266] In 1902 around 71 companies were reported to have been conducting mining activities.[267] The most prominent properties, such as the Cinnamon Bippo, the Effuenta, the Prestea, the Tarkwa Main Reef, the Wassau, the Wassaw West, the Adjah Bippo, the Abosso, the Tarka, and the Abbontiakoon Mines, had all come into the possession of new owners.[268] The latter four properties were in a particularly favourable position since the Government railway reached the area in 1902. Though throughout this level of activity more critical voices remarked that although the Wassa gold fields were still in a process of development, the effects of the boom could still not be denied.[269]

In 1901 Tarkwa counted a population of 176 Europeans, as compared to the 96 stationed or living in Accra.[270] In addition to the few skilled engineers and prospectors from the previous gold rush, who now went after jobs as mining consultants, a flood of European miners and entrepreneurs arrived, who had pre-existing occupational and financial links to South Africa.[271] The new, mostly British firms generally appointed upper-level managers from the Rand. These newcomers of British, Australian, and American origin distinguished themselves from the previous generation of miners due to their extensive knowledge of developing mining companies in various parts of the world. The new group was praised for supporting a more long-term perspective on development.

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[266] The *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 'The Gold Coast West Africa', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 17 September 1901, 3.
[267] PRAAD ADM 5/1/11, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1902, p. 29.
[268] Dredging on the Ankobra, Fura, Offin rivers also took off during this period. It reached a peak in 1909, when 15 dredges were operative and 20,102 ounces of gold recovered. PRAAD ADM 5/1/18, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1909.
[269] In 1903 the *Economist* printed the following statement: 'The West African Gold industry as yet can hardly be said to have emerged from the development stage, though accordingly to some of the numerous mining companies' reports recently issued, development on a few of the properties is in a forward condition'. 'West African Results', *The Economist*, 3 January 1903, 14.
[270] *Parliamentary Papers 1905*, [Cd. 2660], p. 145: Census of the British Empire for 1901.
[271] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 122.

They were also more efficient and economical than past miners. Visitors to the area around 1902 highlighted this contrast between the personnel of the first and the second gold rush with the statement that the 'class of European miner in West Africa has improved out of all recognition in the last few years', though the break was not absolute either.[272]

> 'The London offices have, judging from what I saw heard, learnt one lesson anyway. The class of man which they now send to the Gold Coast is the right one. The manager is a man who understands men and organisation as well as mining; the doctor — and a great deal in a mine in a tropical climate depends on the doctor — is a man who knows that there are other ways of keeping men fit besides the daily dose of quinine; the superior staff-the heads of the machinery, surveying, assaying, and other departments — is composed of men, each a technical expert in his own line; the foremen, engine-drivers, mechanics, and miners are, with the inevitable exceptions, sober, clean living, and hardworking men.
>
> The result of this improvement in the staff is that money is well spent and not frittered away on ill-considered plans: the work is better done, and more of it, both by the European and native, for there is a better understanding between the two; and there is far less expensive wastage in men through ill-health.[273]

Though the authors assured, occasionally 'one comes across one of the old sort'.[274]

Due to the efforts of the new miners and entrepreneurs, Tarkwa evidently stood out from most of the colony and its protectorates as a site of economic 'progress'. A visitor to the district during the second gold boom painted a picture of a conquered environment characterised by the roar of machines and a whirlwind of human activity:

> All that could be seen of the town from the station was a row of wooden, tin, and brick buildings, consisting of the Bank of British West Africa and various merchants' stores on the ground floor, with the living quarters of the occupants above them, surrounded by wide verandahs and covered with the usual whitewashed galvanised-iron roofs.
>
> To the west, on the other side of the railway, was a bare hill, dotted with blackened tree stumps, from which the Court House and two or three bungalows blinked at us in the dazzling sunlight. Several lonely-looking banana-trees were the only natural ornaments left on the whole hillside, for, as is generally the case with clearings out here, the work had been done too thoroughly. One would have thought that a few trees might have been left to please the eye and give a little shade.
>
> North, south and east, the view was cut off by other hills on which were perched the buildings of Abbontiakoon, Tarkwa, and Effuenta. The tall smoking chimneys of the two former; the faint clanking of chains, rattle of stone, and buzz of machinery; and the bustling figures of

[272] Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, i, p. 143.
[273] Ibid., pp. 126-7.
[274] The authors described a miner of the 'old sort' who showed up in Tarkwa during the visit: 'ragged, unshaven and unwashed, hard put to it, in fact, for his company having failed, the mine where he was employed had closed down, and he was tramping the bush in search of work'. Ibid., p. 143.

numerous workmen, small in the distance, gave the scene a busy modern air that seemed out of place in the wild forest through which we had rolled in such leisurely fashion all the morning.[275]

One area where there was a marked change from the past was in the technique of mining itself. The mining entrepreneurs of the twentieth century wanted nothing more than to distance themselves from the previous boom period, in which market manipulation and speculation were exploited in an excessive manner. They therefore moved into a new stage of deep level mining, which required large capital inputs in the drilling, crushing, extraction, and separation processes.

Fig. 3. Map of Most Successful Mines 1900 to 1905

[275] Ibid., pp. 99–100.

Twentieth-Century Promoters and Prospectors of the Wassa Gold Fields

Quite a few southern African Randlords, who were connected to Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company, in addition to running the diamond and gold mining industries in southern Africa, also became invested in West African gold mining around the turn of the century. The 'Tarbutt' Group, which comprised Percy Coventry Tarbutt, Edmund William Janson, and Edmund Davis, belonged to the most prominent examples of South African mining interest at work in colonial Ghana after 1900.

Percy Coventry Tarbutt

The British-born Tarbutt was famous for running companies but also for being a highly eloquent and persuasive promoter of gold mining in parts of Australia and North and South America. These skills were later used to support mining developments in West Africa.[276] He had initially moved to southern Africa in 1888 where he found employment as a consulting engineer for Cecil Rhodes's Consolidated Goldfields of South Africa. During the 1880s and 1890s he became an early proponent of a novel technique, namely deep level mining. Deep level mining was just starting to become an influential mining practice at the time at which Tarbutt pushed for its incorporation in South Africa, as well as north of the Limpopo River. Though Rhodes was initially sceptical about this new advance, after Tarbutt had threatened to invest his own money to get the company to move forward with this experiment, there was a shift in the magnate's mindset. The sinking of bore holes eventually yielded the huge quantities of gold that lay several

[276] Tarbutt was already in his mid 50s by the time he convinced various business partners in South Africa and England to join him on some gold mining ventures in West Africa. He eventually managed to persuade the Consolidated Goldfields to invest in gold mining in Tarkwa, as well. I. Phimister and J. Mouat, 'Mining, Engineers and Risk Management: British Overseas Investment, 1894–1914', *South African Historical Journal*, 49 (2003), 17.

hundreds of feet below the outcrop of the main gold-bearing reefs on the Rand. By August 1892, less than a decade later, Tarbutt was a director of Consolidated Goldfields.

Tarbutt subsequently became a mining entrepreneur in his own right. For example, he founded the African Estates Agency, which purchased shares in other highly profitable deep level mining companies. After returning to England as a very rich man in 1895, Tarbutt went into a mining consulting business called Tarbutt Sons and Janson with Edmund Janson and Cecil Quentin, with whom Tarbutt had run a civil engineering business before leaving for South Africa, namely the Tarbutt's Liquid Fuel Company.[277] The bond between Tarbutt and Janson was further cemented when the 31-year-old Janson married Tarbutt's daughter in 1899.

Though there are no obvious business collaborations between Tarbutt and Edmund Davis predating their time in Wassa, both men fostered close professional ties with Cecil Rhodes. The Australian-born Davis had also developed a solid career in gold mining on the Rand. He arrived in South Africa around 1883 where he initially made a name for himself in the copper mining industry. In 1895, Davis and Rhodes co-founded the Northern Copper Company Limited, which merged with several smaller businesses to become the Rhodesia Copper Company in 1902.[278] This company later established two of the most significant mining companies in the Copperbelt Province of southern Africa, Bwana Mkubwa and Roan Antelope. Davis was given the nicknames 'The Napoleon of

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[277] *The London Gazette*, 7 June 1887, 3094.

[278] Initially the company was called the Northern Territories (British South African Company) Exploring Company. It took over 1320 square kilometres 'North of the Zambezi' to establish copper developments.

Northern Rhodesia' and the 'Chrome King' because of his ownership of numerous mines over three different continents.[279]

Tarbutt, Davis, and Janson together founded the firm Percy Tarbutt and Co., which acquired several companies in Wassa. The 'Tarbutt Group', according to the Financial Times, 'led the van in the "Jungle" Boom […]'.[280] They directed approximately one third of the active gold mines during the second gold boom at one point in time. Their possessions included the Abbontiakoon, Appantoo, Cinnamon Bippo, Adjah Bippo, Quaw Badoo, Effuenta, Fanti, the Wassa (Gold Coast), and Wassau West Mines.[281] Based on a report from *The Economist*, Edmund Davis had a hand in no less than 35 companies in Wassa during the second gold boom, with a shared capital of £3,300,000.[282] In 1904 Tarbutt was reported as the director of no fewer than 24 important mining development and investment companies in South and West Africa:

> His capacity for work, his mastery of detail, and what may be called his generalship, were so remarkable that he held simultaneously directorships of no fewer than twenty four mining development, and investment cos., not all of which were African. He was chairman of three of those cos. — namely, the British Gold Coast Co., Limited; the Mashonaland Agency, Limited; and the Village Reef Gold Mining Co. As a director he was able in administration, with the advantage of practical skill in mining matters, and he was not the sort of man to be easily influenced by timid counsels or peevish protests when he had made up his mind for what he considered the best.[283]

Nevertheless, Tarbutt was overwhelmingly associated with West African mining at the end of his career:

> With W. African enterprises, however, he had been pre-eminently associated. He was a pioneer of the movement for the development of W. Africa's gold resources — a movement, which, though uneventful for the time being, is still fraught with great potentialities. Those potentialities were foreseen by him before the big boom in W. Africans, and, being early in the field, with his friend

[279] Towards the end of his career Edmund Davis also became a leading financial figure in England. See R. Davenport-Hines. 'Sir Edmund Davis', in D. Jeremy and C. Shaw (eds.), *Dictionarv of Business Biography* (London, 1984); and I. Phimister, 'The Chrome Trust: The Creation of an International Cartel, 1908-38', *Business History*, 38 (1996), 1.
[280] 'Death of Mr. Percy Tarbutt', *The Financial Times*, 1 June 1904, 5.
[281] Phimister and Mouat, 'Mining, Engineers and Risk Management', 3, 15.
[282] 'West African Finance', *The Economist*, 24 December 1904, 2095.
[283] W. H. Wills and R. J. Barrett, *The Anglo-African Who's Who and Biographical Sketchbook* (London, 1905), p. 195. See Appendix 3.2. for Tarbutt's business activities in Wassa.

> and colleague, Mr. Edmund Davis, he had become a Jungle magnate, with large and widely ramifying interests.[284]

The 'jungle magnates' transferred their experienced gained on the Rand to achieve success in West Africa.

Tarbutt became a chief promoter of the second gold rush in Wassa. A 1901 report for *The African Review*, for example, illustrates one of his many attempts to project the earning potential of the Rand on to the Wassa gold fields using tenuous empirical evidence:[285]

> The first indications of the richness of this area are given by the enormous amount of old native workings along the outcrops of these banket reefs. Almost a continuous series of such workings exist over…twelve miles [of reef]…to a depth of 60 or 70 feet until they met with water, which they could not cope with, and they undoubtedly extracted a large quantity of gold. This would indicate that the reefs were richer than those of the Rand, because there were no ancient workings at all along the whole of the banket series of the Rand.[286]

Though some of Tarbutt's promotion and 'get rich' strategies were occasionally considered to be rather dubious,[287] there is little doubt that his firms introduced a much higher level of infrastructure and professionalism to the properties he directed, establishments such as the Abbontiakoon Mines. A short overview of this concession serves to show what this transformation looked like.

Located a few miles north of Tarkwa, the Gold Coast Mining Company's Abbontiakoon property, which had originally belonged to Ferdinand Fitzgerald and J. A. B. Horton, had been abandoned after the economic bust of the mid to late 1880s, but was

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[284] Wills and Barrett, *The Anglo-African Who's Who and Biographical Sketchbook*, pp. 195–6.
[285] See also, 'Fanti Consolidated Mines, Limited', *The Economist*, 16 February 1901, 249.
[286] *The African Review of Mining and, Finance and Commerce*, 2 March 1901, in Phimister and Mouat, 'Mining, Engineers and Risk Management', 13.
[287] Phimister and Mouat put forward that shareholder market manipulation continued to be an issue after 1900, and that Tarbutt was an especially ruthless manipulator. Ibid., 4.

newly registered to the Davis, Tarbutt, Janson Group on 27 January 1901.[288] It was floated with a nominal capital of £500,000 sterling.[289] 200,000 shares were issued at £1 each.[290] Part of the property was turned into a subsidiary called the Abbontiakoon Block 1 in 1903. However, the subsidiary company gradually subsumed the land of the Abbontiakoon (Wassaw) Company, and in 1909 the latter concession became fully absorbed.

A good amount of the share capital represented investments into newer and more efficient technology. During the 1880s colonial commentators regarded the property as a place of technological experimentation and advancement.[291] Nevertheless, none of this had compared to the development witnessed during the second gold boom. When Decima and Frederick Gordon Guggisberg toured the Abbontiakoon (Wassa) Mines during his

[288] Part of the property was turned into a subsidiary called the Abbontiakoon Block 1 in 1903. However, the subsidiary company gradually subsumed the land of the Abbontiakoon (Wassaw) Company and in 1909 the latter company was fully absorbed.
[289] 'Abbontiakoon (Wassaw) Mines Limited', *The Economist*, 4 May 1901, 675.
[290] Ibid.
[291] The innovative and skilled engineers, the Gowan brothers, were pioneers in the introduction of more modern, capital-intensive, crushing machinery for gold ores into the region. Prior to their employment with the mines the only crushing equipment on the concession had been 'a pair of Patterson's "elephant" stamps which were extremely lightweight, as they consisted of only two stamps and the engine to drive it'. Quartz was rudimentarily crushed in a 'primitive-looking wooden structure, after the fashion of the "gravitation" stampers'. *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure 1 in No. 19 in [C 3687], p. 54. By developing their own roads, the Gowans were also the first to successfully transport heavy machinery through the dense forest with the use of trolleys into the Tarkwa district. Administrative onlookers reported that, 'Machinery is being put up as fast as possible, and stamping should commence ere long now. Mr. Gowan, manager of the above mine, has brought two trucks laden with machinery, in all weighing one and a half tons, from Bonsah to Abontuyakoom. This is the first time that such a thing has ever been even attempted in these parts, no one here believing it possible to drag trucks along such roads. It had taken him a fortnight to accomplish the journey, about 17 miles, and he had had fifty-seven men engaged in the work. At this rate, of course, it would never pay to use trucks, but Mr. Gowan states that now that he has c1eared the road and put down logs of timber over the swampy places he expects to be able to do the journey in two days, with the same weight on the trucks and thirteen men to drag each truck. Should he succeed in this it will alter the case altogether'. *Parliamentary Papers 1883*, Enclosure No. 21 in [C 3687], pp. 61–2: Fourth Monthly Report on the Tarquah Gold Mining District, 31 July I882. Although the parts reached Tarkwa successfully, there is no indication that the referenced Mr. Gowan was ever able to lessen the expense of transportation of this nature so as to justify further importation of similar machinery. The directors dissolved the company in 1886 and all equipment was sold to the Terberibi Mines. *Parliamentary Papers 1889*, No. 66 in [C 5620-24], p. 10.

assignment on a special survey of the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti on behalf of the Colonial Office in 1902, they encountered a vibrant scene:

> The top [hill on which Tarkwa stood] had been completely cleared of trees and presented a busy scene of noise and activity. The whir and clank of machinery from the big galvanised-iron workshops; the irregular tip-tapping of hammers and the steady seething-sound of saws from some new buildings around which a crowd of natives were busily swarming; the clattering of stone and earth as trucks, appearing suddenly out of the ground, shot piles of ore into wooden bins — all these sights and noises combined in proving that Abbontiakoon, anyway, was a live mine.[292]

Almost all aspects of mining had been updated over the past year or two. For one, the Government railway ran straight through the property 'from end to end', allowing for easier transport.[293] Secondly, the plant and machinery necessary for conducting boring operations had arrived early on.[294] On 15 February 1901, diamond drills produced by the Sullivan Machinery Company of Chicago (1888) arrived from Liverpool to test the richness of the various reefs.[295] Six experienced American drill men accompanied them and in 1902 ore of a free milling character was struck, which required the simplest form of treatment.[296]

The Guggisbergs produced a vivid and detailed account of operations on the property and their witnessing of the milling and treatment process. They accounted for the following, starting from underground:

> At intervals along the level, and at right angles to it, short galleries called 'rises' and 'winzes' were driven into thereof. The ground between the rises was blasted out with dynamite cartridges, care being taken to leave a sufficient number of pillars to support the roof.[297]

By 1904 the main shaft of the mine, which was constructed at an incline of 35 degrees, had been excavated to measure 787 feet long, with 5,644 feet of levels, which were

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[292] Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West* Africa, i, pp. 130–1.
[293] Ibid., p. 130.
[294] 'Gold Coast Investment Company Limited', *The Economist*, 23 March 1901, 452.
[295] 'Abbontiakoon (Wassaw) Mines Limited', 675.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, i, p. 135.

driven into the reef along the seam of gold.[298] All of the ore was hauled up to the mouths of the shafts on small iron cages on light rail called skips.[299] From here it had to be transported to the crushing houses. Two African men were employed for this purpose, to sweep the pieces onto a slowly travelling foot-wide leather conveyer belt, which made a 50-yard path to the house and back along pulley-rollers.[300] Before they reached the house for treatment, other labourers inspected the various pieces of ore, checking to remove pieces that did not contain gold.[301] 'Inside the crushing house the ore was transferred to a sort of travelling staircase, which ran the lumps mechanically into the mouths of the "crushers," where the rattle of their fall was lost in a peculiar grinding noise'.[302] What remained of the material was pulverised by a Krupp ball-mill. The pulverising machine rapidly and without much effort worked its way through great amounts of ore. Made out of heavy steel and iron, the grinding mill reduced all remaining lumps into roughly walnut-sized chunks of ore and fed them into rotary driers, where they were rid of all moisture.[303]

There were also improvements in the separation procedure. Instead of using amalgam plates to recover the freed gold, pulverisation was now followed by cyanide treatment, which had become popular in the 1890s. The resulting fine powder-like material landed on another conveyor belt where it was emptied into large circular cyanide vats for the purpose of chemically recovering a larger percentage of gold than had been

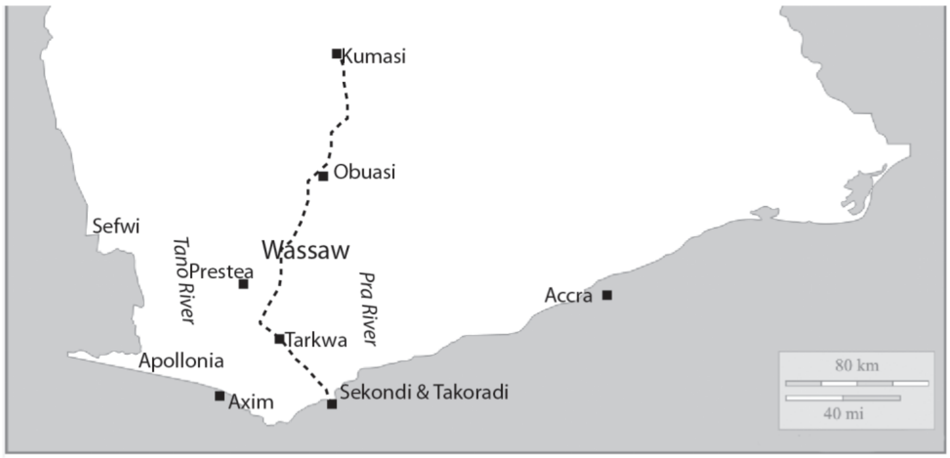
[298] PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, s. 1.
[299] Ibid., p. 138.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid.

possible at any point during the previous boom.[304] In 1905 the treatment plant at the Abbontiakoon Block 1 concession treated 16,544 tons of ore with a diminished recovery of 8,721oz of gold before the end of the year, due to a breakout of fire in the main shaft of the mine.[305] In 1906 it crushed gold up to the value of £132,681.[306]

Percy Tarbutt and his staff also ensured that the Abbontiakoon Mines was one of the first companies to break a dependence on firewood for fuel.[307] Timber was ample in the forest areas surrounding the mines but the supply was irregular, and so was the quality of material. In addition, wood reserves had to be accessed further and further away from the location of the mines. Moreover, wood fuel consumed too much unskilled labour. Firewood had to be collected, chopped, and brought in on the heads of labourers, who often worked on contract, but occasionally also on piecework.[308] Therefore, a nest of eight coal-fired boilers was installed in 1905.[309] The consumption of coal, though no cheaper than firewood,[310] was especially convenient for those mines situated along the railway since they were able to rely on its regular delivery.[311] Moreover, it freed some labourers up for tasks in other areas of the property.

[304] This process was replaced with amalgamation around 1909, which gave way to 'a mill of 25 stamps and 2 tube-mills […] together with sand and slime plant,' in 1912. Ibid., pp. 138–9.
[305] PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, s. 1.
[306] Ibid., s. 5.
[307] In his discussion on production costs for the mining industry during the nineteenth century, Dumett has estimated that 500 to 600 cords of wood were required to heat nine steam boilers on a monthly basis and that at the Tarkwa and Abosso Mines the ten shillings per cord offered to workers made up about one-fifth of the companies' annual charges. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 214.
[308] LMA MS14171, vol. 9, p. 551: 'Manager F. Stone to the Secretary for Mines', 15 June 1903. The manager at the Ayeinm Mine in Ashanti paid 7 pence per cord of firewood produced in 1903.
[309] PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, s. 1.
[310] The cost of coal in 1906 was around 30 shilling per ton. PRAAD ADM 5/1/15, p. 15.
[311] PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, s. 4.

Fig. 4. Government Railway Tracks on the Gold Coast in 1903



Gerhard 'Stocky' Stockfeld

As noted earlier, the 'South Africanisation' of the Wassa gold mines took place at all but the lowest level of the mining hierarchy. In 1901, Tarbutt hired as chief engineer of the Abbontiakoon Mines a Mr. Saltmarsh, who had previously worked on the Rand for the Consolidated Goldfields.[312] The two men working under him, Mr. Flowers and Mr. Bradshaw, also had 'considerable experience in South Africa'.[313] The most notable of this group was Gerhard 'Stocky' Stockfeld, the person appointed to the position of General Manager of the Abbontiakoon Mines after Tarbutt's sudden death from pneumonia in 1904. Stockfeld would become a force of West African mining development, too.

Stockfeld was himself an Englishman with South African gold mining experience. He began his career in Western Australia, on the Kalgoorlie gold fields, and after floating several companies there, he accepted an offer to work in South Africa for what was

[312] 'Abbontiakoon (Wassaw) Mines Limited', 675.
[313] Ibid.

reportedly a large salary. He moved to southern Africa in 1895 as the leader of an Anglo-Australian prospecting party in Matabeleland. Due to the timing of his departure, however, Stockfeld was caught up in the war, the First Chimurenga – the Uprising in Matabeleland and Mashonaland — soon after his arrival. He even joined British troops at one point to fight against Ndebele and Shona people.[314]

Stockfeld stayed in southern Africa, returning to Australia only in 1899 to serve as General Manager of the Burraga Mine of the Lloyd Copper Company, before moving to Tarkwa in 1904 in order to manage the Abbontiakoon Mines.[315] He became a celebrity in the Wassa gold fields. In professional circles he was praised as the man 'to whom is due the chief credit of having brought West African gold mining through troublous [*sic*] times to a successful issue'.[316] According to popular accounts, no other mining entrepreneur matched his optimism and persistence.[317] Although optimism was instinctive in this particular context, in 1905 he reported to the shareholders of the Abosso Mine that when he managed that concession,

> It has become the fashion to compare mining in many parts of the world with the Rand. In most cases this habit may be called an injustice to the managers of the mines; but I can nevertheless assure you that if you take the trouble to hunt up the records of the Rand at a period in its history which will be on a par with the age of the Tarkwa group, you will find that the comparison as regards costs will be in favour of the Tarkwa group of mines.
> […]
> If our costs are at present higher than those of the Rand, out profits per ton are greater than most of the Rand companies.[318]

Other commentators insisted that he was 'alone among the earlier managers, who showed real faith in the country; his name should not be forgotten'.[319] A political official also

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[314] Stockfeld was falsely reported as a casualty of the First Chimurenga. 'Rain at Kalgoorlie: Death of Mr. G. A. Stockfeld', *The Advertiser*, 6 July 1896, 5.
[315] 'The "Lloyd" Copper Company, Ltd.', *The Financial Times*, 29 May 1899, 3.
[316] 'Company Report of the Taquah Mining & Exploration', *Mining Magazine*, 2 (1910), 155.
[317] Ibid., 155.
[318] 'Abosso Gold', *The Financial Times*, 16 December 1905, 2.
[319] Curle, 'West African Mines', 44.

regarded him in the highest esteem: 'I fancy a good many "Jungle" mines would have a different tale to tell if there were more men of Mr. Stockfeld's capability and energy in West Africa'.[320]

At the time the Tarkwa and Abosso Mines were under the operation of the Aqua Mining and Exploration. Stockfeld managed both properties until June 1911.[321] Apparently, his dedication to this company also served to encourage additional South Africa involvement in West African mining:

> It is not too much to say that his success at the Taquah and Abosso was the chief reason for the South African houses taking an interest in the district.[322]

Stockfeld remained a loyal promoter of the Wassa gold fields long after the end of the second gold boom in 1905. The Tarkwa and Abosso mines went into voluntary liquidation in April 1928.[323] However, years later, in the 1930s, Stockfeld was publishing promotional pamphlets for the gold mining in Wassa, including *The Gold Coast and Ashanti Gold Mining Industries: A New Rand*, and *The Empire's Future Goldfield: A Second Rand: Gold Coast and Ashanti*, and *The North Ashanti Mining Company*.

The Tarkwa and Abosso mines were amongst the few successful properties that did not have ties to the Tarbutt network. Originally one of Bonnat's concessions, and already quite prosperous during the first gold boom, it was re-registered by Thomas F. Dalglish in 1899; another individual with ties to South African mechnised mining.[324] In 1901 the company was split, forming the Tarquah Mining and Exploration Company Limited, while the Abosso property became a subsidiary. The two concessions were run

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[320] Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, i, p. 107.
[321] 'Company Report of the Taquah Mining & Exploration', *Mining Magazine*, 5 (1911), 75.
[322] 'Company Report of the Taquah Mining & Exploration', *Mining Magazine*, 2 (1910) 155.
[323] *The London Gazette*, 20 March 1923, 2195.
[324] *The London Gazette*, 6 January 1899, 101; *The London Gazette*, 16 January 1900, 315.

separately, with the Tarkwa concession having a considerable shareholding in the Abosso Mine. Mine management was vested in W. H. Rundall until 1904, and then in George Bailey. Stockfeld was General Manager at the time. Though some milling had been conducted on a small scale on the Tarkwa and Abosso concessions from 1892 to 1898, after 1901 they were severely overhauled and milling became a mainstay of production.

Located in the river valley approximately four miles south of Tarkwa, the Abosso concession was one of the big hopes for West Africa. It started with an issued share capital of £400,000. The concession boasted the possession of the deepest shaft in the colony in 1905. Its main incline shaft was 975 feet in depth with six levels, most of which were still being regularly expanded: [325]

> The S.W. Incline Shaft, which is about 700 feet away from the main incline was sunk 57 feet, making a total depth of 289 feet. No development has been done on the first and second levels, but the third level was advanced 457 feet, making a total of 2,145 feet driven. The fourth level revealed a length of 1,699 feet, of which 763 feet were driven during the year, and on the fifth level 852 feet were driven, making a total length of 1,343 feet. The sixth level was started and 293 feet were driven. 2,414 feet or winces and raises were completed making a total of 5,246 feet. [326]

The level of production increased steadily with the erection of a 30-stamp battery that year, which crushed 26,843 ounces of gold, valued at £107,344, and a cyanide plant.[327] By 1907 the company was equipped with a 50-stamp battery.[328] In addition to stamp milling and pebble milling, mine management had also constructed a chemical treatment plant in the twentieth century.

A significant amount of development was also done on the Tarkwa concession, which started with a share capital of £349,079. Like the Abosso concession, its

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[325] PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, s. 6.
[326] Ibid.
[327] PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, s. 1.
[328] 'Taquah and Abosso Gold Mining Company (1900) Limited', *The Economist*, 16 December 1905, 2037. Profits continued to fall. In 1907, 39,435 tons of ore were crushed and 11,055 tons of old tailings, through which 27,607 ounces of gold were retrieved. Reaching an estimated value of £117,275, this added up to a decrease of £19,501 from the previous year. PRAAD ADM 5/1/16, p. 21.

geographical location, lying just alongside the government railway, made the Tarkwa property another prime candidate for an infusion of heavy machinery. In fact, the 'Taquah mine was not only more favourably situated for work than the Abosso, but the reef being larger and more regular, and confined between walls, offered much greater facility for cheap work'.[329] Deep level mining was developed at a similar pace as its sister mine and at the end of 1904, the main incline shaft reached a depth of 750 feet.[330] Mining was being conducted on 2,219 feet on three levels.[331] In the last four months of the year 1905 a light ten-stamp battery was introduced that crushed 1,605 tons of ore to make 1,215 ounces of gold.[332] A cyanide plant was also constructed in 1905, which worked by a suction gas producer for a more economical use of fuel. The treatment plant treated 2,360 tons of ore, recovering 673 ounces of gold.

Guided by principles of modernisation and professionalism, the men from the Rand were eager to develop not just profitable but solid mines in southwest Ghana. Investors back in Britain reacted positively to the infiltration of this new South African mining network into the Wassa gold fields. The outlook of many of these companies was excellent and the scale of operations picked up dramatically. These changes served as a catalyst to a growing level of gold exports, 'from about 6,000 oz in 1901 to over four times as much in 1902, to about 71,000 oz in 1903, and about 104,000 oz in 1904'.[333] Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, deep level mining did not necessarily lead to a shrinking of the labour force, but it required a cheaper, respectively more efficient staff. Contract labour was needed and, through all of these changes, mining entrepreneurs still

[329] 'Taquah and Abosso Gold Mining Company (1900) Limited'
[330] PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905, s. 5.
[331] Ibid.
[332] Ibid.
[333] K. Dickson, *A Historical Geography of Ghana* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 189. Appendix 3.1.

depended on the incorporation of indigenous patron-client relationships in order to sustain production, and recruitment was not getting easier but more difficult. Mine managers preferred to rely on a single recruiting source in order to limit competition, as they did on the Rand.[334] However, French conquest into Liberia in the 1890s initiated a drastic decline in Kru labour imports, leading to recruitment through headmen from within a wider West African network. Moreover, as the following chapters later demonstrate, they also saw themselves depending on independent labour recruiters, and on the Government Transport Department, to meet the remaining shortfall.

3. 2. The Restriction of Kru Labour Exports in Liberia

The story of the twentieth-century mining industry was one of concentrated mass migration from within a broader West African network. An initial indicator that Kru labour was becoming increasingly scarce appears in the company records of the Ashanti mines in 1896, when mine manager Edwin Cade reported to his board in London that Kru men were of the most valuable underground workers 'to handle machines, to stoke, and generally to show the other natives both to work and to exercise care'.[335] However, he continued, it 'is regrettable that the supply is running short.[336] Cade then explained that 'the French have put an export duty on them'.[337]

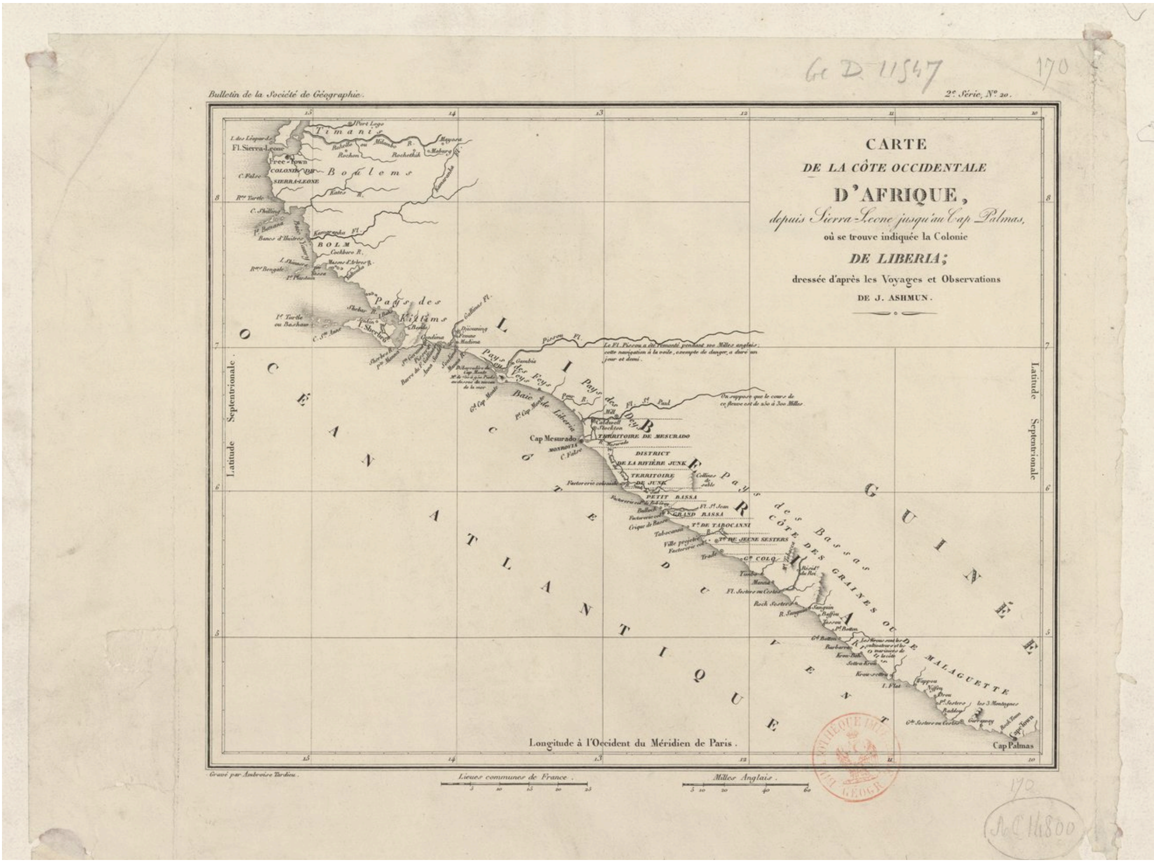
Starting in the late 1890s, imports of Liberian labourers began to decrease following French territorial conquest of Liberia. Coinciding with the end of the first gold

[334] A. Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Mines' Labour Supply, 1890–1920* (Kingston, Ont., 1985).
[335] For the full report, see 'Report to the Directors of the Cote d'Or Company', *Cade Papers*, 14 February 1896.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid.

boom in Wassa in 1885, French officials claimed that their possessions extended continuously from the Ivory Coast into the southern tip of Liberia, beyond the Cavalla River and Cape Palmas through to the town of Garawe. The French Government even made further claims of territory lying in the heart of the Liberian Republic, including Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, and Grand Butu.[338] It was the area between the San Pedro river to the east and the Cavalla river to the west in particular that instigated trouble for foreign employers in West Africa, because it also happened to be practically the natural boundary of an expansive Kru population during this period. According to Buell, 'the very fact that this coast was inhabited by a valuable source of labor supply, made France desire its possession'.[339]

[338] Starr, *Liberia,* pp. 112-3.
[339] R. L. Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa* (2 vols., New York, 1926), ii, p. 789. Starting in 1890 the French began to recruit Kru labourers to work on the Panama Canal and for work in the French colonial army. Ibid., p. 777. Frost puts forward that labour was Liberia's main export in the nineteenth century due to restricted economic development, and that for this reason a tax was levied on migrants going to work for wages elsewhere, which had the effect of restricting the number of available contract labourers along the West African coast. *Work and Community among West African Migrant Workers since the Nineteenth Century*, p. 10.

Fig. 5. French Map of Liberia from 1835
with a large marker of the Kru Settlement on the southern Coast.



Source: BNF [http://gallica.bnf.fr].

French claims on these points were based on agreements that had purportedly been made between traditional authorities in these locations and the commanders of war vessels. Tensions between the two governments peaked in 1891, when French officials informed Britain of a desire to set up formal administration as far as Garawe, though alas they were contented only to control the area bordering the Cavalla River.[340] After the failure to win the support of the United States and Europe nations, on 8 December 1892

[340] Starr, *Liberia,* p. 113. The southeast region of Liberia, as far east as the San Pedro River now lying some 50 miles in modern Ivory Coast from the current border, had originally come into the possession of the Liberia government in 1857 and officials still held the deeds of purchase and treaties to prove it.

the newly appointed Liberian president, Joseph James Cheeseman, accepted a treaty drawn up by French officials, which granted France territorial rights to confirm the current border of Liberia and the Ivory Coast.[341] In exchange the Liberians received 25,000 francs. Still, disputes connected to the application of the treaty dragged on into the 1920s.

With this acquisition in 1892, a vital source for the supply of Kru labourers fell under French control. In addition to levying higher taxes on Kru labour exports, and thereby raising recruitment costs for foreign employers in colonial Ghana, French officials also began to recruit large numbers of Kru labourers for their own usages, i.e. to work on the Panama Canal or in the French Colonial army. The recruitment of Kru men would only become more difficult a decade later, as the Liberian government had a growing incentive to limit Kru exports from areas within its own boundaries.

A significant Kru settlement had also developed in Kru town, later known as the township of West Point, in northern Liberia during the nineteenth century. At the turn of

[341] In 1892 the Liberian Government issued a printed appeal to the United States and Europe stating: 'We appeal to all the civilized nations of the world. —Consider, we pray you, the situation. Having been carried away into slavery, and, by the blessing of God, returned from exile to our fatherland, are we now to be robbed of our rightful inheritance? Is there not to be a foot of land in Africa that the African, whether civilized or savage, can call his own? It has been asserted that the race is not capable of self-government, and the eyes of many are watching the progress of Liberia with a view to determining that question. We only ask, in all fairness, to be allowed just what any other people would require—free scope for operation. Do not wrest our territory from us and hamper us in our operations, and then stigmatize the race with incapacity, because we do not work miracles. Give us a fair chance, and then if we utterly fail, we shall yield the point. We pray you, the civilized and Christian nations of the world, to use your influence in our behalf. We have no power to prevent this aggression on the part of the French Government: but we know that we have right on our side, and are willing to have our claims to the territory in question examined. We do not consent to France's taking that portion of our territory lying between the Cavalla and San Pedro Rivers; nor do we recognize its claims to points on our Grain Coast, which, as shown above, our government has been in possession of for so long. We protest, too, against that government's marking off narrow limits of interior land for us. We claim the right to extend as far interiorward as our necessities require. We are not foreigners: we are Africans, and this is Africa. Such being the case, we have certain natural rights—God-given rights—to this territory, which no foreigners can have. We should have room enough, not only for our present population, but also to afford a home for our brethren in exile who may wish to return to their fatherland and help us to build up a negro nationality. We implore you, the civilized and Christian nations of the world, to use your influence to have these, our reasonable requirements secured to us.' Cited in Ibid., pp. 114-15.

the twentieth century, the Liberian government increasingly limited recruitment from the peninsula in the city of Monrovia. Firstly, parallel to the explosion of foreign commercial activity in other parts of West Africa in the 1890s, there were also growing efforts by Liberian rubber farmers to increase local agricultural outputs.[342] These farmers, however, were struggling with a labour shortage at the same time that their government was supporting the exportation of local labourers to other parts of West Africa in order to support foreign industries.[343] Furthermore, these tensions arose at a time in which the republic was already feeling a weakened hold over the indigenous population. Therefore, the legislation to restrict labour exports may have been a way for the government to exert political strength whilst appeasing local producers.

In any case, in 1902 President Garretson Warner Gibson indicated the government's disapproval of the export trade in Liberian labourers.[344] His pronouncement prompted a formalisation of this objection and by 1903 officials enacted legislation only to permit recruitment for foreign enterprises that were in possession of a recruitment license, which cost 250 dollars. Additionally, instead of accepting ten shillings in head money, the law required an end to the recruitment of all labourers under the age of 21; imposed a fee of five dollars per recruits; and, demanded a deposit of $150 from recruiters to guarantee that each labourer returned, or was returned, once their term of service had concluded.[345] Both French conquest and Liberian politics would have a direct impact on the demographic of the labour force in Wassa.

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[342] Buell, *The Native Problem*, ii, p. 777.
[343] Ibid.
[344] The Liberian President announced: 'I trust you will see the importance of discouraging any proposal looking to the removal of labor out of the country'. Message of the President, in Ibid.
[345] Ibid.

In a break from nineteenth-century trends, the percentage of Liberians available for contract work was on a drastic decline from the late 1890s, forcing mining entrepreneurs in Wassa to take swift action. In 1902 Mr. Bullen, the Secretary of the Mine Managers' Association, a central organisation for local companies, requested that 'in view of the increasing difficulty of obtaining native labourers, more especially Kru boys and Bassas, owing to the reported increase in head money from 10/- to £2,' the Colonial Office and the local Government Transport Department come to their assistance by endorsing a recruitment monopoly for foreign employers, a scheme discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.[346] In the meantime, however, mine managers had to cast a wider net for labourers from other parts of West Africa, including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and French colonies.[347] Although Liberian labourers, who purportedly 'took more readily to drill and hammer work than any other' were still preferred,[348] according to an administrative report from 1903 on the value of tribes as workers, other groups were now also being deployed for underground mining in larger numbers.[349] For example, migrants from the coast, described as Appollonians, who had 'ancient mining traditions dating from Portuguese times', would go underground, albeit with reluctance.[350]

The population of surface labourers, cutting firewood, clearing bush, making excavations, and moving loads, also became more diverse around this period. 'Yorubas

[346] Bullen therefore requested that the Government Transport reduce the £1 deposit that the department requested for the provision per individual gang of contract labourers. CUL RCMS 139/12/25, Extract from 'Letter from Jas Bullen the Hon. Secretary of the Mine Managers' Association'.
[347] Dumett has noted that, at the turn of the twentieth century, 'imported Kru labor would continue to play a role, but increasingly, for a variety of unskilled tasks they would be augmented by ever larger numbers of migrant workers from Nigeria, French-speaking West African territories, and especially the northern savanna region of Ghana'. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 269. However, Migrants from French colonies, Mali and Burkina Faso, only appear to have come to the Gold Coast in large numbers after the First World War. RHO MS 7ss 13 s.4, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1918. M. Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule* (London, 1968), pp. 336-340.
[348] PRAAD ADM 5/1/12, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1903, p. 49.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid.

and others from Lagos' would not work underground but could be hired for the aforementioned tasks.[351] Groups such as the Krepis, Ewe peoples from southeast Ghana and southwest Togo, were hired strictly for specific mining duties in surface work.[352] Mine management also hired Mende and Timmani men from the Sierra Leone protectorate and Vai people from the southwest coast of Liberia in this context.[353] Of the local men from southern Ghana, usually referred to as Fanti, it was said that they had not proven themselves as assets to mining companies in any way, 'except for very desultory surface work'.[354] Interestingly, labourers from the Northern Territories, who would become so important to mining development after 1906, were described as avoiding gold mining all together; the Wangara and Moshi people being strictly interested in working as carriers.[355] Yet, Europeans still saw them as having much potential, for those who had been tried in working around the mills 'settled down to surface work tolerably well'.[356] By 1904, of an estimated 17,044 African labourers who were employed in the gold mines in the towns of the Tarkwa and Obuasi, less than 20 percent were of Kru or Basa origin; a drastic decline from the 67 to 70 percent during the nineteenth century.[357]

If the professionalisation of mechanised mining and the introduction of deep level mining to Wassa largely fell in line with the experience in all other major gold fields around this period, one element that continued to set this gold rush apart was the manner in which labour was organised. Recruitment through career headmen continued to be

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[351] Ibid., p. 50.
[352] Ibid.
[353] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 6.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Colonial observers anticipated that with the completion of the railway the carrying industry would decline and that these men would eventually be obliged to take on work elsewhere, including the mining industry. RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 6.
[356] Ibid.
[357] Appendix 3. 6. And 3. 7.; PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Department of Mines for 1904, p. 271.

broadly integrated.[358] Deep level mining demanded greater control over the workforce, so as to ensure efficient production; however, until they could establish a direct overview over the labour force, foreign employers still preferred labourers to arrive at the gold mines under the leadership a headman who could vouch for the workers, take care of them, and discipline them during their term of service.[359]

The wage rates assigned to mineworkers were in general considerably higher than that of an average unskilled labourer during this period. The daily wages of surface labourers started around 1s 3d with 3d subsistence; underground miners could earn around double the amount, at 2s 3d with 3d for subsistence per day.[360] Nevertheless, an even more important incentive for many labourers to sign on to extended contracts was the advance payment that they received before the contract began. At first glance the provision of cash advances before miners actually witnessed the conditions of work, in combination with a system of extended payment, seems to point to a system of debt-based coerced labour. Nonetheless, evidence from court records reveals a system with numerous pitfalls for employers, too.

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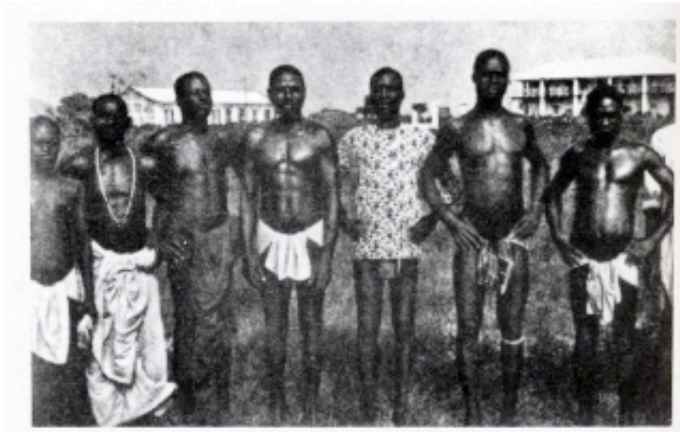
[358] Mine managers on the Rand had also learned to tolerate indirect recruitment so long as it was conducted by agents who were under their control to a reasonable extent.

[359] For example, in 1906 the Chief Officer of the Government Transport Department made very clear his dislike of casual labourers. 'The Mendes and Yorubas come to this colony on their own initiative and take up such work as offers. They stay with an employer so long as it suits them and when the inclination takes them to make a change they merely await pay day to leave'. CUL RCMS 139/10/3, No. 661/06.

[360] Appendix 3. 4. And 3. 5.

Fig. 6. Unskilled Kru and Akan labourers on the Gold Coast around 1895–1905



Source: R. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 260.

Indigenous Credit Relationships

While the historiography of industrial labour history in West Africa has largely highlighted socio-political power as being used by African authorities to coerce other men into working in colonial mines, less attention has been paid to monetary relations.[361] Yet, there is an abundance of evidence showing the importance of economic incentives

[361] Some contemporary accounts of the headship also overemphasise the social power of headmen. For example, in 1909 a missionary in Ghana portrayed Kru headmen as having 'almost absolute power' over the labourers in their gangs. Russell, 'Pidgin-English Amongst the Khroos', *Work and Workers in the Field* (1909), 206. Another missionary describing a gang of Yoruba woodcutters residing in the Wassa area also contended that the headmen was a type of religious authority: 'The history of the Yoruba presence in Ghana has not yet been written, but it seems likely that only from the beginning of this century were Yorubas immigrating in large numbers in response to the demand for labour in the mining areas of the Western Province and southern Asante. Of special significance in Anglican history were groups, which contracted to cut firewood for the mines; these seem to have been scattered in six to ten temporary villages near Tarkwa Prestea and Obuase. From early on in their period of residence the Christians in such groups set up their own churches, and, since they came from Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) areas in Nigeria, they regarded themselves as Anglicans. Just as the Yoruba Anglican congregation in Sekondi was acting on its own initiative in 1902 and was only discovered by official Anglican when N. T. Ramlyn visited Sekondi in 1904, so these later congregations appear to have evolved with no reference to any external authority. The Ghanaian priest E. D. Martinson was given pastoral oversight over them as catechist and later parish priest of Tarkwa, 1912-24, and learned the Yoruba language to do the job properly. According to him, their key leaders were usually prophet-like figures of considerable presence who were recognised providers of religious leadership.' P. Jenkins, 'The Anglican Church in Ghana, 1905-24 (I), *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, (1), pp. 25-6.

for recruitment. Cash advances were an especially popular enticement for potential contract labourers. Moreover, employers in Wassa could not use debt-based coercion in a strategic manner since it was only beneficial to strengthening legal action under the sporadically implemented Master and Servant Act. Put differently, indirect recruitment through a headman was a system of voluntary debt bondage, rather than debt-based forced labour. If the organisation of labour under 'traditional' African authorities in colonial mines was drawn from an older social and political order, then there is little precedent for social power as an exclusive means of accessing the labour power of an individual over an extended period of time, as has been argued by some historians.[362] Even the most coercive forms of precolonial economic exploitation in West Africa tended to depend on some degree of reciprocity, as well as an offering of economic opportunity and protection, as shown in Chapter 1.

It has been mentioned that associations between some headmen and the members of their gangs may have been temporary in a professional sense, but that in most cases they had connections to a home region. As a case in point, it is known that all career headmen initiated the 'collection', or 'shepherding' of migrant workers in their joint rural home region.[363] Nevertheless, one ought not to put too much emphasis on the personal nature of their relationship. The provision of advance payments, cash in hand before a labourer had completed a single day's work, was a major factor in convincing men to agree to lengthy stints in the gold mines.

While the attraction of accumulating additional capital over the term of the contract was certainly essential, for many men it was perhaps only of secondary

[362] See, for example, Brown, *'We Were All Slaves'*, p. 58.
[363] These contemporary terms were used to describe this system of indirect recruitment.

significance. Evidence in favour of this argument is seen in an administrative report, which noted that '£2 a month with an advance of 20/- is more desirable than £2 10/- a month with no advance'.[364] Men from the urban coastal regions of Ghana were particularly fond of this deal, despite its negative impact on their overall earnings.[365]

According to Hill, credit relationships were an integral part of rural based economic production and development in parts of West Africa going back to 'time immemorial'.[366] Giving credit was however, not only a means of profit-making.[367] It was also expected of those farmers who could afford to that they would provide loans to poorer ones.[368] During the early colonial period similar credit relationships were also starting to serve urban-based economies.

An administrative account from 1903 indicates in quite clear terms that most labourers working in a steady and extended manner in Wassa entered into the wage labour market because of offerings of credit. The official remarked that foreign employers were willing to give cash advances 'primarily for the purpose of paying his [the labourer's] debts (not for supporting his family), as otherwise his creditors, and natives have creditors, would not allow leave'.[369] Incurred debts naturally had to be paid off before labourers could migrate to the urban areas. But over time even when workers were not actually experiencing any particular financial hardship they could expect to get

[364] CUL RCMS 139/12/11, 'Memorandum on the Concession Labour Bill', enclosed in Confidential dispatch, Chief Justice to Chief Officer of the Transport Department, No. Case 714.
[365] Ibid. This behaviour was likely encouraged by the scarcity of cash in southern Ghana.
[366] Hill, *Development Economics on Trial,* ch. 8.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.
[369] CUL RCMS 139/12/11, 'Memorandum on the Concession Labour Bill'.

an advance, and use it for the fulfilment of economic and social ambitions most likely connected to their homes, villages and rural occupations.[370]

At first glance an indentureship of novice labourers seems to be implied in this exchange. It appears as if employers and headmen were purposely getting them into debt by between 10 and 30 shillings, the equivalent of eight days' and a months' pay, before they had a chance to observe and consent to the conditions of work in the gold mines. Nonetheless, it was actually the rising power of labourers to make such demands that stimulated a spread of the credit system. With the course of time, labourers no longer needed to demonstrate any personal indebtedness, as advance payments were increasingly integrated into the recruitment process, strictly for the purpose of getting them to sign on to agreements:

> If men are engaged at their homes the advance systems is reasonable, but men at the mines get advances far from home and for no reason other than as an inducement to take work. The transfer of services from one mine to another is due almost if not entirely to the advance systems and this transfer of services will be reduced according as advances are reduced. To some extent the mining companies have the remedy in their own hands; if they agree amongst themselves to lower the advance in there will be fewer peripatetic labourers.[371]

Colonial authorities such as the one quoted above worked by a moral principle which determined that the spread of credit needed to be curbed, ignoring the economic logic of this provision. To enter the lucrative recruitment business, a headman first had to

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[370] Also, Austin has mentioned that because cash was scarce, and because of time and effort that needed to be invested in securing a loan, a decent profit could be made from lending cash at sufficient interest. *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana,* p. 369.

[371] CUL RCMS 139/12/11, 'Memorandum on the Concession Labour Bill'. One major implication of choice-based debt-bondage was that the poorest members of the community, including many formerly enslaved Africans, were discriminated against in the recruitment process for the Wassa mines. For rural-based economies in colonial West Africa Hill has previously described how the poorest members of rural communities were the least likely to migrate to new areas. She has also convincingly argued that the poorest members of such communities were the least likely to get access to credit due to their socioeconomic standing. We can safely assume that creditor-headmen, who only had a weak personal relationship with the members of their gangs, were even more careful about whom they gave advances to. *Development Economics on Trial*, ch. 8.

persuade several men to work in and extended manner. To attract workers access to credit was a most effective tool. Therefore, it is arguably more accurate to think of credit first and foremost as an inducement for labourers; then as signifying a switching of patrons; as enabling migration for some previously indebted rural labourers; and, only marginally as a tool of oppression.

Though mine managers understood competitive advance payments to be at the heart of the desertion problem, many companies did not see a way around it. They incorporated the headship system and occasionally also became financial backers of the credit relationship itself. Yet, they still predominantly relied on the social skills, as well as the business knowledge, of the headman to carry out this risky process. The headman (and via the career headman, the mining company) was in the most financially vulnerable position in the initial phase of the new agreement. Above all, he had to reckon with workers absconding, since the Master and Servant Act was only sporadically enforced in Ghana during this period. Court records from Tarkwa District during this period reveal that some labourers never arrived at their place of employment after receiving an advance.[372] There were also instances in which labourers accepted advances, and had their passage to the mining centre paid, but not long after beginning their contract decided to leave the mines and find work elsewhere on the coast.[373] One such case is documented in the legal trial of Kwesi K., who was accused of defrauding £8 12d and a railway ticket from a mining company via an African labour recruiter employed by the

[372] PRAAD ADM 27/4.

[373] After gaining a £1 advance and 15/- subsistence from the Abbontiakoon Mine, the contract worker going by the name of Englishman, purportedly suddenly fell sick of jaundice, thereafter disappearing for a two-month period. His headman was sent to find him. Englishman was discovered ‘working in the railway yard clearing grass with a cutlass’. He later claimed to be discontented with the work conditions in the mines; it was too hard. He refused to return. PRAAD ADM 27/4/49, ‘J. D. Jally v. Englishman, Jacob, Serge’, Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner’s Court, 28 October & 1 November 1909, pp. 708–9, 719.

firm.[374] In addition to an advance payment, under a system of extended payment, the headman provided small loans to the men when necessary. Though labourers could still go to with third-party creditors to obtain loans, a behaviour that could lead them down a path of destruction. It was actually expected that the headman was responsible for the labourers' debt during the term of service. For example, in a 1910 letter, one headman Bowee contracted to a mining company through the Government Transport Department complains about the burden of his men being allowed to take credit from 'Fanti' people, individuals from southern Ghana: 'I have been taken all debts, whenever they take any credit from the Fanti people and go up when they signed without notice [without the headman's approval]. I am not receiving anything from them. I am doing this all on your account for [sic] the respect I am always getting from you.[375] The financial vulnerability of employers would only gradually shift to the labourer, at the point in which the labourer had credit in his name with the company; a condition made possible by the extended payment system, discussed later on in this chapter.[376] Until that point miners could largely abscond with impunity.

Nevertheless, this does not erase the fact that there were instances in which employers did use the advance system as a coercive tool. Accepting an advance stood as a ratifying seal of approval upon a labourer's consent to serve. Therefore, among the few trials for breach of contract under the Master and Servant Act in the Tarkwa district records, on numerous occasions debt is named as the primary factor hindering a

[374] The labourer Kwesi K. had originally agreed to take on contract work under the recruiter. PRAAD ADM 27/4/45, 'Superintendant J. A. Strong v. Kwesi K.', p. 231.
[375] RCMS 139/12/52, Letter No. 3, 3 February 1910. Unfortunately, there is little detailed information in the sources to explain how this risk was contained.
[376] Though economic vulnerability shifted from the recruiter to the recruit overtime, the labourer's social security was meant to remain stable.

withdrawal of labour. Since employers could not otherwise legally obligate a labourer to continue his service, they instrumentalized his debt to the company. For example, in 1904 Gerhard Stockfeld of the Abosso Gold Mining Company, mentioned debt as part of his legal argument against an absconded worker by name of Joe Mendi, who had signed on to work for 12 months on 24 June: 'On 22nd of June [he and other men] got advances. Accused left without motive on the end of [September] or early in October'.[377] Following a similar pattern, in 1914 the superintendent of African labourers at the Abbontiakoon Mines, Charles Robert Miller, reported of a gang of deserters:

> They were given advances [and] sent down by rail by the company. I put them to work at Cinammon Bippo where they were given further advances [and] rice. They deserted from Cinnamon Bippo between July 13th [and] August 1st. They were all in the company's debt […].[378]

Even more important than the mere existence of a contract between employer and employee, was the question of whether the labourer still owed the company money.

It was exceedingly difficult for an unskilled labourer to get out of a contract legally, once advance payments were involved. For instance, on 21 September 1904 it was recorded that the contract men Illasi, Salakor, Abbey, Adessoman, and Hadji had left the Abbontiakoon mines without any intention of returning. Yet, when confronted by the mine manager John White they offered to return their individual £1 advance payment to the company. Once some of them had done so however, White further accused them of owing subsistence money starting from the day on which they were engaged.

White had hired the gang at the coastal town of Sekondi just weeks earlier on 6 September:[379]

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[377] PRAAD ADM 27/4/44, 'Rex v. Joe Mendi', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 7 May 1904, pp. 307–8.
[378] PRAAD ADM 27/4/54, 'Inspector General of Police v. Bukai Bazahim', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 1914, p. 306.

> I met a gang of 35 boys at Sekondi which I had had sent here from Accra. At Sekondi they entered into contract with me before the D.C. Sekondi. (Contract produced), I sent them to Tarkwa. They arrived on the 12th there; on the 14th they started to work. On 20th the headman of gang reported that one gang of 6 boys refused to work. No definite reason was given.[380]

A career headman had supervised the gang, and had accompanied it from Accra to Sekondi. He was more frank about their discontent with work conditions on the concession:

> I live Abontikoon. I know accused. They are my boys. I work with White. I bring them from Accra for White. He met us at Sekondi. I went. They signed on before Commissioner. We bring the boys to Tarkwa. They began to work. Yesterday they refuse to work because it is hard. I reported it to White. He went to ask them to come back. They refused. They offered to pay money. They pay £1.7.9.[381]

Consequently, the gang was asked to reimburse the entirety of transportation costs that had accumulated during the recruitment process, including the journey between Accra and Sekondi, and between Sekondi and Tarkwa.[382]

'Incurring debt under false pretence' was a crime that carried severe fines and months of hard labour.[383] Two of the five, who had returned the advance payment in full, were fined £3 pounds sterling or one month of imprisonment. A third labourer, who had returned seven shilling and nine pence, was liable for the same fine. The remaining two labourers were fined £5 sterling or two months imprisonment.[384]

The case of the African labourer Bokai, who succeeded in reimbursing the mining company that engaged him before leaving the concession, highlights the extent of

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[379] PRAAD ADM 27/4/43, 'Rex v. 12 Illasi; 75 Salakor; 38 Abbey; 22 Adessoman 34 Hadji', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 21 September 1904, pp. 599–601.
[380] Ibid.
[381] The independent headman who had been in charge of bringing the group from Lagos to Accra, and who went by the name of Illasi, also explained to the manager that the work conditions on the mine had caused most of the men to fall ill. Therefore, they preferred to look for work in Abosso. PRAAD ADM 27/4/43, 'Rex v. 12 Illasi; 75 Salakor; 38 Abbey; 22 Adessoman 34 Hadji', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 21 September 1904, pp. 599–601.
[382] One labourer eventually returned back to work. Ibid.
[383] See, also, PRAAD ADM 27/4/40, 'Rex pro Kofi H. v. Asamoah', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 6 March 1893, p. 426.
[384] PRAAD ADM 27/4/43, 'Rex v. 12 Illasi; 75 Salakor; 38 Abbey; 22 Adessoman 34 Hadji'.

oppression that could be used by the British courts in extreme cases. Bokai was hired as a contract labourer through the Government Transport Office at Sekondi on 22 October 1903. However, after reaching the Tamsu mine, where he had been engaged as the headman of his gang, he had allegedly fallen sick.[385] In court he argued that this had been the cause of his desertion just days later and that he had returned the advances forwarded to the manager before he left:[386]

> I left Tamsu because I was not well. The manager wrote me about the 10/- I received from Sekondi. I told him I had given the 10/- to the [white] headman. I was sick for 3 days. I told the white man I was sick. I went to Lagos Town in Tarkwa. I was sick there. The 10/- is with the whiteman.[387]

Bokai was nevertheless sentenced with '£2, or in default 2 month imprisonment'.[388]

Reports from the Tarkwa district court document reveal the cases of *de facto* indentureship in the Gold Coast during the twentieth century. At the same time, one must keep in mind that penal sanctions in relation to the Master and Servant Act were already very rare, and that employers only used debt to discipline labourers in a fraction of these cases. It is therefore unsurprising that in 1906 the Acting Governor Herbert Bryan did not deny all similarities to debt bondage systems present in the British Empire, but he argued that, 'labour [in the Gold Coast] is seldom 'indentured' in the strict legal interpretation of the word'.[389]

Perhaps the most effective, if not the most austere, measure of keeping men in the mines was the extended payment system, though it could only be implemented to the

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[385] PRAAD ADM 27/4/43, 'Rex pro Superintendant Phillips v. Bokai', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 1903, p. 89.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Ibid.
[389] *Parliamentary Papers 1906,* (357), p. 34: Coolie Labour. Herbert Bryan the Acting Governor argued, 'labour is seldom 'indentured' in the strict legal interpretation of the word'.

benefit of employers after a labourer had credit in his name.[390] The majority of workers on agreement in Wassa did not 'draw their pay until the final completion of their contract'.[391] They did not see any of their wages for the length of their six- to twelve-month contract. This method of compensation was practised because it increased the likelihood that African contract labourers worked in a steady an extended manner. This reasoning is illustrated by an administrator in 1903, who commented that 'a labourer does not desert when he has some money standing in his credit, except the provocation on part of his employer be unendurable; and there being no monthly payment in his case he does not take two or three days off after pay day to enjoy himself'.[392] The same official insisted that when 'a man has a sum of credit to his name he becomes trustworthy'.[393] Even so, the extended payment system was not without its problem.

For one, mine management still had to be concerned about desertion until the point at which their company was indebted to a labourer, and in situations where competitive advances of around 30 shillings had been handed out to men it took between 15 and 24 full working days for a labourer to pay off what the company or headman had already invested in him.[394] In addition, that labourers became increasingly discontent the longer they lived and worked under such conditions is seen in one employer's conclusion

[390] PRAAD ADM 5/1/13, p. 49. Employers at times manipulated the ratios of wage to cash advance to subsistence payment balance in ways that they though would be more attractive to labourers on their properties. For example, in 1903 the manager of the Abosso mine experimented with raising the labourers' subsistence payments, which they received on a daily basis. He offered men who were already earning 1 shilling in wages and 3 pence, 9d pay and 6d subsistence instead. The idea behind this was apparently that a greater share of cash-in-pocket until the contract was over would serve as a motivating factor. CUL RCMS 139/4/50.
[391] PRAAD ADM 5/1/13, p. 49.
[392] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s.4.
[393] PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1908, s. 5.
[394] The wages of underground miners were significantly higher that those of surface labourers.

that: 'I do not care that they be bound for longer [than six months], as much trouble arises in consequence'.[395]

Spending and the Issue of 'Choice'

During their time in the mining centres, similar to older forms of dependencies that existed with the institution of nineteenth-century slavery or debt bondage, and akin to contemporary employment relations in farming, most labourers were maintained. They could attain access to products such as food, clothes, and small sums of money, by bargaining with their headmen.[396] In addition, there was the option of taking out a loan from a local moneylender, generally individuals from the coast.[397] Labourers did so for a variety of reasons. Some were interested in pure enjoyment and entertainment purposes, activities such as gambling, drinking, and sexual relationships.[398] However, several others used their money to meet social and economic goals back home, as exhibited in the private correspondence of African contract labourers kept in the private papers of the Chief Officer of the Government Transport Department intended for publication. How Migeod came into possession of these writings, in particular those that were not addressed to him but to family members, remains unclear. However, they are significant

[395] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 4.

[396] Around 1908 savings accounts also became an important means of guaranteeing that labourers did not desert. Some employers even stipulated that labourers have an account with a saving bank before they were hired. Their wages would be deposited here at the end of a contract. PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1908, s. 5.

[397] See, for example, the letter by the headman Bowee. Chapter 2, p. 80 n.

[398] Mineworkers preferred to work in big cosmopolitan towns. According to one manager, African workers 'do not appreciate living at Sansu as well as at Obuasi, owing I believe to a great scarcity of food, and also that much more amusement can be obtained from a village of five or six thousand inhabitants to one of only a few hundreds. LMA 14171, vol. 2, s. 24: 'General Manager John Daw to the Directors of the Ashanti Gold fields Corporation', 28 January 1902. SOAS MMS FBN 3, No. 116 Missionaries in the 1890s described gambling as being endemic in the mining villages: 'Labourers who have gone thither from various parts of the coast have not improved matters and added to this unscrupulous men desirous of making money without labour have followed these toilers and gambling has resulted.'

because they provide another avenue from which to discuss the issue of 'coercion' versus 'choice'.

One letter sent to a Kru contract labourer named 'Gin Bottle' by his wife in Bonthe District Sierra Leone on 22 June 1912 illustrates an instance of litigation throwing a labourer and his family into financial hardship. It is significant however, that this legal debt did not push the labourer into the wage labour market, but rather appeared during his stint in the mines:

> My Dear Husband,
> I acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 5th inst. Contents perused with care.
> In reply whereof I am very sorry to hear of the misfortune that happened to you for which you please have my sincere sympathy. I hope you try to be careful of yourself yonder as time is very hard now, and you are the only person [I] am relying on.
>
> Sorry to inform you that I had a dispute with Soco Beah and the dispute was taken to the Barray [barrister], in which they gave me wrong; and the sum of 27/- was left in the barray. For which dear husband I beg to ask you respectfully to send me this amount. I met the Chief Speaker of Domborkoh and I promised to return this amount at the ending of this present month. If I don't I shall [be] remove[d] from my place to stay with him until you send the money or I get same to give them.
>
> If no money [is] near you try to loan money and send it.
>
> In you going I advised you not to play cards any more. I hope you try to keep my advice because you yourself know that you went there to find money and when you come all people will be looking on you to see what you will bring so you must be careful how you are using your money. If you don't get any place to keep it, put some to the Government Bank so whenever you want it you can take it [from] there.
>
> Whenever you are coming you must please let me know. And in your coming you must be careful as a man who is looking round here told me that you will be deprived by the way coming by robbers. So you must be very cautious or particular. Do try to send that amount quickly. Daddy Baurkie (?) said that you must try to send that amount, and gives you his best compliments.
>
> Wishing you well Kind regards,
> Yours truly,
> Conah Mandorrah, her x mark.[399]

The letter written by the wife Conah Mandorrah is compelling for several additional reasons. It names some of the financial pitfalls of life in the mining centre, such as gambling, and contrasts them with the opportunities available to financially savvy

[399] CUL RCMS 139/16.

labourers, i.e. putting some money in the Government bank. Connected to this latter point, it highlights mining work as a financial opportunity with which much honour is linked in the home village. The following three letters, though they occur during the interwar period, are also worth considering.

Another issue that could require large sums of money before a contract had been completed was the following of rural customs. For example, in another letter written to a Mende migrant labourer in 1919 he is solicited to send money, essentially loan money, for his grandmother's upcoming funeral celebration. It was sent to him by his sister near Pujehun District in southern Sierra Leone:

> Dear Lacton,
> I am […] glad to hear that you crawled through the great Influenza. Mama is here not quite 3 feet off me whilst writing this. [She] came purposely to know if [there was] any news from you. I told her you are well. I am ordered by her to inform you that next April is fixed for the celebration or last burial for grandmas Jani and Basseh and would take place at Meena and that you please send in whatever you can. Mama [is] saying: I cannot believe that you are again thinking of me as a mother and without my prayers you can hardly make rapid progress: the very last of all my issues, and earning money you've not been able to send me even a 1/- to buy tobacco? Oh no, my boy I was not expecting this from you. Are you not thinking that the country is 5 times harder than when you were here.[400]

Assuming that he has some savings by now, his mother also uses the opportunity to request that he send her a little spending money.

A third letter demonstrates a labourer, who appears to be of Liberian or Sierra Leonean origin, sending money home to secure the hand of a wife, a young girl just out of the Sande bush school where she was being prepared for married life:

> Dear Momo Gbainya,
> This letter is to let you know that Bindi and I are working together in the Transport Department at Kumasi and we are both quite well. We are very pleased to hear that you have been made paramount chief of our country. Bindi received a letter saying his Aunt Navo died some time since but now he has an Ashanti wife named Ajira (?). I want you please to bring Sara out of the Sande bush, and write and tell me when you have done so as I wish to arrange for her to come to me

[400] Ibid.

here. I will send money for her. Bindi wants you to beg his brother Josiah to look after his two wives honestly until he comes back […]
With all best wishes,
Alimendi[401]

Evidently, the contract man had intended to spend some of his money in this manner for some time.

In a fourth letter indicates we see that wages earned in the mines could be intended for the educational training of children. It was sent to a contract labourer by his son, who was attending the Anglican St. Cyprians School in Kumasi in 1919:

My Dear Father,
I am just to inform you this few lines, to say that the time when to Tarquah you told me at station that if you reached you will send me some money . You fail to send it. And also I have no trouser and coat. So you must send me some money about £6 myself I don't think that you will come here again. And you brought the money to your wife and your children. I want £1 from you, and buy me one felt. Try your best as possible. Tell you master that since he went to England I don't saw [*sic*] his face. So, let him try to send me some English things. I am here with your sister Ikaman. I heard that you['re] going to Bongo with your master, for one year and six months. So try your possible best and send me the things, which I tell you on this paper. I have passed my examination. I want all of my Christmas things because you will go before Christmas comes. I have no dresses at Christmas time. I have no more to say again,
I am your loving son,
Joseph Bomah [402]

The son's wants are purely material in nature and indicate that his father would perhaps have been an African labourer of higher standing, perhaps a clerk.

Finally, to refer back to the writings of Captain Allen of Elder Dempster from the 1840s, he also emphasised the headship as a voluntary system.[403] Having been in regular contact with Kru contract labourers, he drew parallels between headship and the apprenticeship system that British officials had introduced into Sierra Leone following the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. On the one hand, it was expected of wealthy members of the community that they educate, broadly-speaking, the less fortunate. That

[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Allen, *A Narrative of the Expedition*.

British officials made liberated slave children, who had been rescued from illegal slavers along the West African coast, apprentices to well-to-do members of the community was certainly not free from abuse. However, the system aimed at giving them an opportunity to improve their lives, and remain independent of the state; certainly appealing ideals for the Kru, who historians have frequently portrayed as a self-sufficient social group eager to uphold its independence from the governmental incursions.[404] Of the inexperienced Kru labourers, Allen noted that the 'commencement of their career is by an apprenticeship to a headman — generally an influential person, and of great previous experience, whose duty it is to initiate his 'boys' — as they are called — into the various duties the white man may require'.[405] According to him, the members of a gang were eager and willing to make sacrifices for this experience: 'For this preliminary education he [the headman] receives a small portion of the wages of each of his party'.[406] From the captain's perspective these labourers were not loyal subjects or oppressed countrymen, but individuals who were taking action to participate in the free market. As one missionary in Ghana explained in 1896, Liberian workers did not regard themselves as more oppressed, but rather as more civilised, than Ghanaian labourers.[407]

The legacy of slavery in colonial Ghana was expressed in the need to rely on African intermediaries to mobilise men. Nevertheless, indirect recruitment was not slavery. It is undeniable that the choices of labourers to acquire credit was furthering the expansion of

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[404] See, for example, Y. Person, 'Western Africa, 1870 – 1886', in J. D. Fage and R. Oliver (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Africa c. 1870 to 1905* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 227.
[405] Allen, *A Narrative of the Expedition*, pp. 122-3.
[406] Ibid., p. 123.
[407] According to the missionary the Liberian workers viewed them as stupid 'bushmen'. 'They [Liberian labourers] on the other hand are not, they "eat rice"'. *Work and Workers in the Field* (1896), 25.

the wage labour market around this period, though some coercion was built into the system once they signed on. The skills that could be acquired from wage work was especially important for Liberian contract labourers who had little opportunity in the agricultural market around the turn of the century.

We have learned that African workers were able to negotiate their employment in the mines to a certain degree. It has also been shown that headmen maintained some autonomy in the credit system. Nonetheless, neither one of these statements should leave the impression that employers in the mines were uninterested in increasing their control over the labour force. Parallel to the expansion of indigenous credit networks through West Africa, mine managers strived for a system with greater regulation. They wanted much greater control over the labour market. For this purpose they propositioned British officials for support in establishing a recruitment monopoly, as well as a pass law system, as is discussed in the following chapter.

Appendix Chapter 3

3. 1. Yearly Output of Gold from 1886 to 1905

Year	No. of ounces obtained	Estimated Value
1886	20,799.06	74,829 0 0
1887	22,546.80	81,168 0 0
1888	24,030.625	86,510 0 0
1889	28,666.80	103,200 0 0
1890	25,460.30	91,657 0 0
1891	24,475.60	88,112 0 0
1892	27,446.06	98,806 0 0
1893	21,972.06	79,099 0 0
1894	21.332.18	76,796 0 0
1895	25.415.94	91,497 0 0
1896	23,940.66	86,186 0 0
1897	23.554.74	84,797 0 0
1898	17,732.70	63,838 0 0
1899	14,249.87	51,300 0 0
1900	10,557.37	38, 007 0 0
1901	6,162.99	22,187 0 0
1902	26,911.15	96,880 0 0
1903	70,775.20	254,790 0 0
1904	104,460.279	378,480 0 0
1905	171,149.723	653,820 0 0

Source: PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1905,

enclosure in Gold Coast No. 175, 9 April 1906, p. 14.

3. 2. Percy Tarbutt's Business Activities in Wassa

COMPANY	ISSUED CAPITAL IN POUNDS STERLING
British Gold Coast Caida (Wassaw)	100,000 248,776
MANAGING DIRECTORS	
Fanti Consolidated	412,764
DIRECTOR	
Abbontiakoon (Wassaw) Abosso Deep Banda Syndicate Effuenta (Wassaw) Fanti Mines Gold Coast Investment New Gold Coast Agency Tarkwa Railway and Mines Syndicate Wassau (Gold Coast) West African Gold Trust	500,000 5,000 10,600 423,500 1,139,000 400,000 549,997 150,000 246,300 152,600
DEPUTY MANAGER	
Adjah Bippo Cinnamon Bippo	70,000 92,000
TOTAL CAPITAL	4,510,537

Source: 'Death of Mr. Percy Tarbutt,' The Financial Times, 1 June 1904, 4-5.

3. 3. Labour Employed in the Mining Industry in 1905

YEAR	UNDERGROUND	SURFACE			TOTAL
	Males	Male	Female	Total	
1903	2,727	4,046	7	4,056	6,799
1904	6,103	10,941	0	10,941	17,044

Source: *Parliamentary Paper* 1906, Part II in (Cd. 2734, 2745, 2911], p. 353: 'Mines and Quarries: General Report and Statistics for 1904'.

3. 4. Average Daily Wages Paid at Abbontiakoon Mines c. 1903

Carpenters	3s 6d	
Blacksmiths	2s 6d	
Masons	2s 6d	
Fitters	2s 6d	
Engine Drivers	2s 6d	+3d rice
Firemen	1s 9d + 2s	+3d rice
Painters	2s	+3d rice
Drill boys	2s	+3d rice
Shaftmen	2s	
Shaftment after working 6 months	2/6	+3d rice
Timbermen	2s + 2s 6d	+3d rice
Miners	1s 6d	+3d rice
Fanti labourers	1s 3d	+3d rice
Krepe	1s 3d	+3d rice
Tramming in mines	1s 3d	+3d rice
Kru Labourers	1s 3d	+3d rice
Senegalese	1s 3d	+3d rice
Not paid on Sundays. Not paid when sick.		

Source: CUL RCMS 139/12/35

3. 5. Daily Wages Paid To Labourers in the Mines in the Gold Coast and Ashanti in 1904

Miners	from 1/6
Shatfsmen	from 1/9
Surfacemen	1/3
Fitters from	3/- to 3/6
Carpenters	from 2/6 to 3/6

Source: PRO CO 98/14, p. 5: Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1904

3. 6. Labour in the Mines in the Gold Coast and Ashanti in 1904

Origin	Number of men	%
Kru boys	2,382	13.97
Bassas	846	4.97
Mendis	743	4.36
Yorubas	1,187	6.97
Hausas	399	2.34
Ashanti	2,766	16.22
Fanti	6,545	38.40
Krepe	1,934	11.33
Appolonian	242	1.42

Source: PRO CO 98/14, p. 5: Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1904

3. 7. Population Census of Tarkwa in 1904

	MALES	FEMALES	TOTALS
<u>INDIGENOUS TRIBES</u>			
WASSAW	13538	10919	24457
THE GOLD COAST COLONY	4865	3526	8391
ASHANTI	583	297	880
THE NORTHERN TERRITORIES	2419	286	2705
<u>OTHER BRITISH COLONIES</u>			
NIGERIA	2179	778	2957
SIERRA LEONE	621	393	1014
WEST INDIES	3	--	3
TOTAL	**2803**	**1171**	**3974**
<u>OTHER COUNTRIES</u>			
FRENCH COLONIES	2054	703	2757
LIBERIA	1026	335	1361
TOTAL	**3080**	**1038**	**4118**

Source: RHO MS 7ss 12 s.1, p. 353

3. 8. Active Mining Companies in the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1904

Wassaw (Gold Coast) Mining Company (Adja Bippo, Cinnamon Bippo)
Bibiani Goldfields Ltd.
Broomassie Ltd.
West African Hinterland Consolidated Ltd.
Abbontiakoon Block I
Abosso Gold Mining Co.
Himan Concessions Ltd.
Prestea Mines Ltd.
Anfargah Gold Mining Co.
Appantoo Mines Ltd.
Asiakwa Hydraulicking and Mining Co.
Attasi Mines Limited
Axim Mines Ltd.
Bartie Corporation
Bokitsi Miines Ltd.
British Gold Coast Company
Chida (Wassaw) Mines Ltd.
New Gold Coast Agency
Eduapriem
Effuenta (Wassaw) Mines Ltd.
Appankran Concessions Ltd.
Ashsnti Propriety G. Mines
Gold Coast Amalgamated
Muntriam (Wassaw) Mines Ltd.
Sekondi & Tarkwa Company
Tarkwa Banket Mining Syndicate
Tano Bippo Gold Mining Co. Ltd.
Tarkwa & Abosso Gold Mining Co.
Wassaw West Amalgamated

Source: Report on the Mining Industry for the Year 1904, CO 98/14, p. 4.

CHAPTER 4. The Transport Department: Government Methods of Indirect Recruitment and the Concessions Labour Ordinance of 1903

In the two previous chapters it was noted how the gold mines in Wassa were able to incorporate indigenous clientage systems during the first and second gold boom, and how the relationship of dependency between a career headman and the members of his gang contained indigenous notions of economic and social authority. There are additional sources pertaining to the appropriation of headship by colonial authorities for the purpose of expanding the wage labour market. From 1903 the Government Transport Department provided contract labourers to the mines. Under the department's auspices, however, headship was transforming into a meritocracy. Headmen were stripped of their authority and the transport officers themselves assumed a middleman role in order to gain control of the labour market and to limit competition. The story of the Government Transport Office illuminates an instance of direct colonial assistance to the recruitment efforts of the colonial mines. It also highlights the rare and sporadic implementation of the master and servant law around this period, and this colonial agency's aspiration to pass stricter labour laws in conjunction with the Mine Managers' Association, a central organisation in Wassa.

The introduction of deep level mining compelled employers in the Wassa mines to attract more skilled labourers whilst decreasing their average labour expenditures. They could only do so by engaging more contract men, preferably at lower wage rates, and by ensuring that these labourers did not desert. They strived therefore for the elimination of all competition by establishing a recruitment monopoly. Collaboration with the Government Transport Department, which had no tools to induce immediate and greater labour control, was a contested issue from the start, and before giving in to this suggestion by the Colonial Office, mine managers would seek out more far-reaching and permanent avenues for labour control.[408]

The question of importing coolie labour on a large scale, for example, was still heavily discussed, and Percy Tarbutt led the charge for the Asian solution. The British mining entrepreneur had made his enduring preference for Asian indentured labourers evident on the Rand, in particular during the Reconstruction period after the Anglo-Boer war as the gold mines dealt with a serious labour shortage. In the context of a struggle to recruit a sufficient number of unskilled labourers in order to pick up production levels once again, in 1902 Tarbutt insisted that the Chinese always be hired over unskilled white miners. This ideology put him at the centre of a growing controversy over Chinese labourers. The scandal came to fore when Frederick Hugh Page Creswell, the manager of the Village Main Reef mine, of which Tarbutt was a director, leaked a letter sent to him by the latter.[409] The letter, which Creswell later read before the Labour Commission of Johannesburg, warned managers against experimenting with the employment of large numbers of white men on the property, as they were too expensive and had the potential of becoming too politically powerful, similar to the working classes in Australia or New Zealand. It read:

> Dear Mr. Creswell,
>
> With reference to your trial of white labour for surface work on the mines, I have consulted with the Consolidated Goldfields people, and one of the members of the board of the Village Main Reef has consulted Messrs Wernher, Beit, and Co. and the feeling seems to be of fear, that having a large number of white men employed on the Rand in the position of labourers, the same troubles

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[408] In 1904 the Mine Managers' Association, a central organisation for mining companies, demanded that the Government Transport Department be replaced by a labour bureau. CUL RCMS 139/12/42.
[409] 'White Labour on the Rand', *The Economist*, 24 October 1903, 1798.

will arise as are now prevalent in the Australian colonies, namely that the combination of the labouring classes will become so strong as to be able to more or less dictate on the question of wages, but also on political questions, by the power of their vote when a representative government is established.
Yours truly, Percy Tarbutt.[410]

The Chinese labour question touched on concerns about the future path of development of the colony, but at the heart of this heated argument was a threat to the existing racial order within the mining industry itself.[411] There was widespread opposition to the importation of Chinese labourers, because even though they worked at much lower wage rates their presence failed to contribute meaningfully to the overall social and economic development of the colony. Even more importantly, as Dagmar Engelken has posited, the mere presence of an expansive population of poor whites fractured the underpinnings of an ideology of white supremacy. Creswell himself had eagerly employed former white farmers who had lost their livelihood due to the war, with claims that when compared with their Chinese counterparts, whites were more cost-effective, since they supposedly had a greater output of labour.[412] Though he was not able to convince mine managers, Creswell subsequently went on to join the South African Labour Party, eventually becoming its leader in parliament.[413]

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[410] Ibid. After the war, the administration took steps to provide support to unemployed British ex-servicemen, who had remained in the colony. The British High Commissioner Alfred Milner developed a scheme together with the mines to employ them in unskilled mining positions, though at wage rates much greater than what Africans had received for the same work. While the ex-servicemen deemed the wages to be too low, the type of work to be too severe, and the lifestyle in the mining centres to be substandard, by contrast many Afrikaans-speakers grasped the opportunity to work their way up into skilled mining positions. This experiment was however, never thought of as a long-term solution. D. Engelken, 'A White Man's Country: The Chinese Labour Controversy in the Transvaal', in Wulf D. Hund, Jeremy Krikler, and David R. Roediger (eds.), Wages of Whiteness and Racist Symbolic Capital (Berlin, 2010), 167.
[411] Ibid., p. 166-7.
[412] J. Hamill, *The Strange Career of Mr. Hoover under Two Flags* (London, 1931), p. 152; In her recent publication Dagmar Engelken shows how the 'Chinese labour question' drove the formation of political alliances and parties in the aftermath of the First South African War. 'A White Man's Country'.
[413] Skilled white miners were also opposed to Creswell's suggestions for a widespread employment of white workers in unskilled positions because a) their presence endangered the high wages that other whites had had access to up until this point, b) skilled white workers were consequently forced into supervisory

Tarbutt's image of a caste-based future for the South African economy, wherein a minority of whites managed a majority of non-white cheap labour, was also advocated for Ghana where he pushed for an Asian solution to the labour shortage. That same year, as the director of the Abbontiakoon Mines, he explained to his shareholders that, although it would be possible to have African labourers engaged in the more simple jobs entailed in surface mining, the 'actual mining will probably have to be done by imported labour to some extent'.[414] According to him, 'those who have the future of this colony at heart' could not be dissuaded from the promise of this source of labour.[415] He continued: 'I believe that the Colonial Office is devising plans for the encouragement, if not the actual importation of labour from outside'.[416] Coolie labour, however, never became a lasting phenomenon on the Wassa gold fields.[417]

In parallel to these efforts, mine managers in Wassa were also petitioning the Colonial Office for support in coordinating recruitment from other labour-dense parts of West Africa. Here, again, Percy Tarbutt was one of the most vocal proponents of a recruitment monopoly. In 1901 he announced to his shareholders that he had found a solution to the labour shortage: 'I have commenced the institution of a labour bureau'.[418] He went on to explain that the 'proposal is that all the companies requiring labour shall combine and subscribe towards the bureau, thus preventing any indiscriminate touting for

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positions which exposed them to harsh, disease-inducing environments, c) it was generally disruptive to the racial solidarity that existed among whites on the mines, d) a related proposal by Creswell to import Europeans as part of this scheme was unwanted, and e) they feared being replaced by unskilled white workers over time. Ibid., p. 168-9.

[414] 'Abbontiakoon (Wassaw) Mines Limited', *The Economist*, 15 November 1902, 1773.

[415] Ibid.

[416] Ibid.

[417] The multiple failed experiments to import Chinese labourers did not erase the topic from the agenda of mining entrepreneurs altogether, much later even, following a severe labour shortage in 1914, the Abbontiakoon added 26 Chinese men to its staff.

[418] 'Gold Coast Investment Company Limited', 452.

labour by those not properly authorised'.[419] The transnational entrepreneur acknowledged that there 'is nothing novel in the idea; it has been adopted on the Rand, and has worked admirably'.[420] Tarbutt was working on this plan 'in conjunction with other people very largely interested in this coast', one of whom was certainly Alfred Lewis Jones, the Liverpool shipping magnate whose British Cotton Growing Association was an important vehicle to commercial cotton growing on the Gold Coast at the time.[421] Together they forwarded an initial proposal to the Colonial Office regarding the establishment of a *West Coast of Africa Labour Bureau* to bring labourers from various regions of West Africa to areas where there was a demand for them. The new labour bureau would recruit gangs in 'properly supervised and effectively managed depots' for the purpose of straightening out the recruitment procedure.[422] Tarbutt had every confidence in his plan: 'As we develop, no doubt, a proper organisation will be put on foot for the continual supply for labour to these fields'.[423] Nevertheless, the realisation of this project hinged on the Colonial Office's endorsement. Tarbutt hoped 'to obtain the recognition of the Foreign Office to the operations of this bureau, the scheme for which has been very carefully worked out,

[419] Ibid.

[420] Ibid. Starting in the 1890s, in Johannesburg a private centralised labour bureau was set up to regulate all recruitment activities, in order to restrict competition from employers in other sectors, and to limit competition within the industry itself. In connection to the Rand Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman have contended that 'there is little doubt that if large numbers of low-wage, unskilled migrant miners had not been recruited from throughout the subcontinent, there would never have been a deep level gold mining industry in South Africa'. *South Africa's Labor Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines* (Oxford 1991), p. 1.

[421] 'Gold Coast Investment Company Limited', 452. Jones and his associates called for government-supported commercial cotton production overseas in response to a worldwide shortage in cotton around this period. His proposal for a monopoly on labour was, however, only relevant before 1902, when the government actually considered the possibility of large-scale commercial developments managed by Europeans. In the end, the administration concluded that any agricultural development would have to be led by a multitude of small African producers. Dumett, 'Obstacles to Government-Assisted Agricultural Development in West Africa', 159–61. Jones, who was President of the Chamber of Commerce in Liverpool, and carried the nickname the 'Uncrowned King of West Africa', had expansive investments in West Africa. For biographical information, see A. H. Milne, *Sir Alfred Lewis Jones* (London, 1914); 'Gold Coast Investment Company Limited', 452.

[422] 'Gold Coast Investment Company Limited', 452.

[423] Ibid.

so as not to tread on the toes of our friends at Exeter Hall'.[424] His reference to the Anti-Slavery lobby highlights the controversy that continued to surround labour and employment tactics in the colonies, though it is not clear to what extent this actually played a role in the rejection of the proposal that same year.

By 1902 Tarbutt and his associates in the Mine Managers' Association had not lowered their expectations on the issue of labour control; the opposite was the case. In a new proposal sent to the Colonial Office in 1902 by the Gold Coast Agency, a subsidiary of Consolidated Goldfields, it was suggested that an agency be established which, in addition to recruiting labourers in colonial Ghana, other parts of West Africa, and China, would also register them individually.[425] Nonetheless, this scheme did not receive endorsement from the Colonial Office either.

Mine managers were even willing to establish sector-wide cooperation independently if it had the effect of lowering the cost of labour. At this moment of introducing deep level mining, and with the crisis over the shortage of Kru contract labourers, mine managers for the first time came together under a central body, the Mine Managers' Association, which seems to have rested on the leadership of the Abbontiakoon Mines and the Tarkwa and Abosso Mines.[426] The organisation was founded in 1902 to imitate the Transvaal Chamber of Mines,[427] most members in Wassa

[424] Ibid.
[425] Jeff Crisp, 'The Labour Question on the Gold Coast', in Henry Finch and Barry Munslow (eds.), *Proletarianisation in the Third World: Studies in the Creation of a Labour Force under Dependent Capitalism* (London, 1984), p. 31.
[426] Although its membership was much broader, the correspondence of the Mine Managers' Association always came from managers on these two properties based on the irregular correspondence gathered by the author. Moreover, its secretaries and presidents were apparently continuously chosen from within the rank of employees on these two concessions.
[427] Silver, 'The Failure of European Mining Companies', 27.

reportedly having ‘experience in the labour questions of South Africa’.[428] In the absence of colonial intervention, the association developed its own wage-fixing and no-poaching agenda and applied financial penalties to keep all mine managers in line with their policies. Ultimately, however, the entire system was built upon a framework of self-regulation. For example, in the minutes from a meeting held on 11 May 1902, secretary Bullen, who worked on the Abbontiakoon concession, recorded the suggestion that

> mine managers make full enquiries before taking on any gang or boys over ten, applying for work, more especially Kru boys, and communicate with the manager of the last mine on which they are reported to have been, if there is any reason to believe that they have run away. Full particulars being given at request on either side and absconders being allowed to be taken away if sent for.[429]

The responsibility of inquiring about the employment history of each contract gang rested on the already distressed hiring party. Moreover, such a stipulation was costly and time-consuming, not to mention unworkable in a situation where employers were glad to take on every additional gang that they could. There was simply not enough incentive for them to initiate lengthy investigations into potential employees, regardless of fears over a gang’s reliability and trustworthiness.[430]

The members suggested additional paths of regulation. In terms of plans for future action, they discussed that there be a compulsory registration for African workers ‘effected at Secondi, Axim, Tarkwa or any suitable police station, with a fee of 1/- per annum for imported labour [and] 1/- per annum for local labour’;[431] that the manager of the Tarkwa and Abosso Mines keep a record of the employment status of white labourers

[428] CUL RCMS 139/12/25, Extract from ‘Letter from Jas Bullen the Hon. Secretary of the Mine Managers’ Association’.
[429] Ibid.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid.

'to which all members of the association should have access to';[432] and, finally, that were a Native Commissioner to be appointed, as was suggested by the Governor in the past, that 'one be chosen with South African, preferably Rhodesian, experience, where the labour problem is more or less similar to that on the Coast'[433]. Unfortunately, no extensive records of the organisation could be recovered.[434] All that remains is sporadic correspondence between its members and various government agencies, which highlight persistent effort for labour control.[435] Nevertheless, the continued conflicts between mining companies indicate at best a dysfunctional union.

Following their failed petitions the Colonial Office advised mine managers to take advantage of the Government Transport Department, which had originally been set up as a special agency to facilitate and control the recruitment of carriers and messengers for government services, as well as the colonial mines. Indeed, in 1903 the department began to provide contract labourers for mining tasks. However, its involvement in the mining sector quickly evolved beyond the expectations of the colonial state. The department became a middleman in the mining sector's self-regulatory policies. Furthermore, the private papers of Migeod the Chief Officer of the Transport Department reveal close collaboration between the Mine Managers' Association and the chief officer of this

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[432] Ibid. For example, the record book would list the arrival and departure dates of white workers, as well as whether they were on contract or not in order to facilitate accounting.
[433] Ibid.
[434] In 1905 the organisation was succeeded by the West African Chamber of Mines.
[435] Around 1903, in order to keep workers from moving between employers in a disorderly manner, the Mine Managers' Association proposed that, 'if, were they obliged to bear an official pass as being in search of work or one releasing them from their past engagement [and] were also obliged to obtain another, at or through the mine of engagement or reengagement, that evil would be practically obviated [and] the chance of dodging the regulation would be reduced to a minimum, more especially if even a moderate number of reliable civil or mine police were vested with authority to demand the passes of natives in the open street. It would mean the registration of all mining and floating population and need not at present apply further and I see no reason why it should be either a very impossible one to work or even expensive, since it should be self-supporting'. 'Extract from His Excellency's answer to the Proposals submitted by the Mine Managers' Association'.

colonial agency for the establishment of a pass law and stricter penal sanctions for labourers in the mining industry.

The Government Transport Department

The Government Transport Department was founded in 1901 out of ambitions linked to expansionist developmental imperialism. During this period a new colonial state had begun to take shape, which comprised an organisational structure with departments that held specialised functions. Also, with backing from the Colonial Office, new departments were led by larger staffs which were more willing than ever to utilise the mining sector as a significant vehicle for development.[436] Between 1901 and 1902 the duties of the transport officers were solely geared towards transport services; the provision of carriers and messengers to government services and the mines, since modern transportation structures connecting the coast and interior of colonial Ghana were either absent or under construction.[437] Consequently, for tasks related to communication, conquest, and war, transport officers were responsible for organising the necessary labour force. In 1902 the department managed a single station in Cape Coast, for the recruitment of carriers.[438] By the following year, however, it operated a total of five stations in various protectorates of colonial Ghana, including the towns of Dunkwa, Obuasi, Kumasi and Cape Coast, and Sekondi, each being staffed by one European official and a few African clerks.[439] During 1903 Sekondi became the principal station.[440]

[436] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 168–70, 289.
[437] L. H. Gann and P. Duignan, *The Rulers of British Africa, 1870–1914* (Stanford, Calif., 1978), p. 273.
[438] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1902 (1) s. 6.
[439] In 1906 the Government Transport Department also established a station in the Northern Territories.
[440] Before it became a critical point for recruiting contract men for the mines, labourers were hired just to load trains at Sekondi. At Dunkwa and Obuasi the supplies were collected from the trains and distributed by carriers. In addition, the Transport Department ran a mail route through Obuasi and Kumasi. Ibid.

The move of the department's headquarters to Sekondi marked a deepened collaboration between Chief Officer Frederick William Hugh Migeod and the mining entrepreneurs. Some of the most successful mining companies in Wassa at the time, including Cinnamon Bippo Mines managed by Sams, and the Abosso Mines managed by Stockfeld, began to utilise the recruitment services of the Government Transport Department.[441] The port city of Sekondi was a crucial administrative point through which all mine managers passed. In addition, it was strategically meaningful because it was 'doubtful whether an agency at Cape Coast had any access to the class of labour required on mines'.[442] This may indicate that foreign labourers were more likely to travel to Sekondi in search for wage jobs. Nonetheless, according to a statement by an administrator, 'Before the Transport Department moved its headquarters from Cape Coast Castle to Sekondi there was virtually no free labour obtainable at the latter place, and there would be very little again were its headquarters removed elsewhere'.[443] The Government Transport Department was significant because it created for the first time ever a pool of wage labourers that the mines could access at will and without having to deal with African agents, though this pool was limited in size.

The department never did provide an overwhelming number of contract men to the mines, though it did contribute to the reproduction of the labour force. In 1903 the Chief Officer reported that his department had provided a 'considerable', though 'not

[441] CUL RCMS, 139/6, 'Chief Officer of the Transport Department to Manager Cinnamon Bippo'. In 1903 the Governor wrote to the Mine Managers' Association stating that he 'regretted that use had not been made of the native labour and transport agency at the Cape Coast. […] The Government Transport officer could adapt his office to the supply of mining boys and native craftsmen'. CUL RCMS 139/12/25, 'Extract from His Excellency's Answer to the Proposals Submitted by the Mine Managers Association'.
[442] CUL RCMS 139/12/25, 'Extract from His Excellency's Answer to the Proposals Submitted by the Mine Managers Association'.
[443] PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1907, s. 7.

great intrinsically' number of labourers to the mines.[444] The amount of labourers, including all of the carriers that had been contracted to the mines that year, was 2,049.[445] For 1904 he noted that 'the mines have not had to apply to any great extent to the Transport Department for labour and when any labourers have been supplied and have completed their engagement and been paid off, they will frequently go back to the mine on their own account'.[446] In 1905 it sent 300 contract men to the mines.[447] This number dropped to 216 in 1907.[448] However, the Government Transport Department was pioneering in terms of the additional securities that it added to the recruitment process, certainly for European employers, and to some extent for the labourers themselves. Recruitment through the department was probably the most straightforward and least risky manner of hiring a gang for contract work after 1903. When they needed additional men, mine managers made requisitions to the department, i.e. by forwarding a brief telegram notice in which they specified the number of gangs required.[449] The communication relating to such orders was technical, short, and to the point, as seen in the Chief Officer Migeod's letter to one of his assistant transport officers at Obuasi:

> I want two gangs to work at Tamsoo Mine Tarkwa for six months or a year.
> See if Seymour's and Johnson's are willing. Weed out any undesirable men and complete to Headman and 24 with any Mendis you can find. Send the old passbooks to me at Sekondi, and as you probably have no new books, give each headman a gang list showing up to what date subsisted.
> Address the gangs to E.V. Benusan [Esquire] at Effuenta. His house at Effuenta is on a hill lying between the Government Hill and the railway line, and about a mile below Tarkwa station.
> Please wire me result at Sekondi.
>
> F. W. H. Migeod

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[444] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 4.
[445] Enclosure in Ibid.
[446] PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1904, s. 3.
[447] CUL RCMS 139/11/8, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1905, encl. in 'Transport Circular'.
[448] PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1907, s. 1.
[449] CUL RCMS 139/10/3, No. 661/06.

> P.S. Tamsoo is a little South of Effuenta. Subsistence at 3d a day.[450]

Hiring was simple and, since all the members of government gangs received the same wage, the department also took care of quality control, releasing from a gang those individuals whom the transport officers decided were not fit to work in the gold mines.

At the same time, the securities that this new department provided to employers on the Wassa gold fields came at a certain cost, both financial and in terms of the regulation that the industry was not normally subject to, in particular when it came to the treatment of its employees. Mine managers were burdened with various deposits, fees, and what they regarded as general interference. However, improvements were also evident. Daily wages were set at a reasonable 1/- per head, the equivalent of one day's earnings for an average 'unskilled' labourer at the time.[451] Instead of offering competitive advance payments, companies hiring through the department were required to pay a set deposit of ten shillings per individual recruit before the men were sent to a particular work site.[452] According to the *Government Gazette*, this fee, which amounted to around £20 per gang, was utilised to cover any discrepancies in payment which transport officers identified once the contract had been completed.[453]

> At the end of each month the pay sheets should be sent to the Transport Office at Sekondi with a cheque for the amount due to the gang the deposit will be held to draw from in case the transport office considers fines etc. exorbitant etc. When the gang is discharged the deposit, or such as remains of it, will be refunded.[454]

A share of the fees also went to the department's revenue.[455]

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[450] CUL RCMS 139/6/19, 'Chief Officer of the Transport Department to the Assistant Transport Officer at Obuasi'.
[451] See for example, CUL RCMS 139/10/3, No. 661/06.
[452] CUL RCMS 139/12/10.
[453] Ibid.
[454] Ibid.
[455] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 4

At the same time, the *Government Gazette* stated quite clearly that it 'will not be refunded if the man deserts', though the government also attempted to lower risk by providing substitutes in certain cases of absconding:[456]

> The customary advances of ten shillings made to each labourer on enlistment by the Transport Department is refunded by the employer and charged in the labourers' first month's pay sheet. If the labourer deserts before the advance is worked off the employer bears the loss of such part of the advance as is not worked off.

The potential for making huge losses due to desertion was still an issue. Nevertheless, as long as 'ill-treatment' was not the driving factor behind a labourer's leave without notice, the Transport Department guaranteed that another man would complete the contract for 'the period the original man was engaged for'.[457] Moreover, when African labourers under government contracts absconded for unfounded reasons, it was much more likely that the Transport officers would cover the runaway's debts,[458] an insurance which would have only been feasible so long as the rates of desertion remained low. Overall, hiring was quicker and more straightforward through the colonial agency and some of the costs associated with desertion right after recruitment could be reduced.

In connection with trying to gain control of the labour market, the Government Transport Department also institutionalised certain practices to improve the lifestyle and productivity of their staff through greater healthcare and to limit the authority of headmen, by making them dependent on the department in all aspects. In 1903 the department published the *Rules as to the Permanent Carriers in Ashanti and the Northern Territories, and Labourers etc. supplied by the Transport Department to the Mines*. One point of contention between employers and employees, which had to be

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[456] Ibid.
[457] Ibid.
[458] On 30 July 1903, Migeod sent the following telegram to the manager Cinnamon Bippo: 'There will be a refund due to you on some of the men who have deserted with a balance on their credit'. CUL RCMS, 139/6, 'Chief Officer of the Transport Department to Manager Cinnamon Bippo'.

clarified in the government contracts, was when labourers had the right to demand food. The rule stipulated that the subsistence of gangs hired through the government 'must on no account be stopped whether for punishment or any other reason':[459]

> Several amendments have been made in the terms on which labourers were engaged, especially with regard to pay for days on which they do not work. The idea that they should draw their full monthly pay minus deductions for absence without leave, the mine managers said, did not work well. They preferred simply giving a man credit for the days he casually worked. The chief question then hinged on Sundays – whether the employer or employee should bear the cost of the day off. At a fixed sum per month the loss fell on the employer, although nominally on these terms the whole time of the labourer was at the Manager's disposal.[460]

The sourcing of food on non-work days was a particular point of contention between the officers and mine managers.[461] From Chief Officer Migeod's point of view, this issue was especially dire since some men had neither the money — until the very end of their contract — nor the necessary social network to get them through any form of hardship:

> The only solution was per working day, on which terms all have since enlisted. But even then I was obliged to make it a hard and fast rule that the labourers must receive their subsistence whether they worked or not. In the case of men drawing their pay monthly, this would be an unimportant detail; but it is far from being so with those who do not draw and pay till their contract is finished.[462]

At the end of their contracts, the government gangs also had the right to certain amounts of food and drink. The contract stipulated that companies provide subsistence at a rate no less than that which would cover his passage to the Government Transport Department where he picked up his wages:

> On discharge, a labourer or carrier must always be given enough subsistence to reach Sekondi. If he is sick, and likely to be a considerable time on the road the subsistence money must be increased accordingly.[463]

Labourers employed at other stations enjoyed the same benefits:

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[459] CUL RCMS 139/12/10.
[460] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 5.
[461] It has elsewhere been stated that Migeod was in favour of the managers' prerogative to refuse subsistence to men on a Sunday, the day of rest. However, there is little evidence for such a claim, for it was Migeod who attempted to guarantee workers' subsistence seven days a week. Ibid., p. 273.
[462] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 5.
[463] CUL RCMS 139/12/10.

> Subsistence only would be paid for the journey between place of enlistment, i.e. one of the Transport Department stations Sekondi, Cape Coast Castle or Kumasi, and also for the journey back to Sekondi where they are paid off.[464]

Further steps were taken to deal directly with individual workers, and to subtract personal relationships from the equation. To eliminate abuses, headmen employed by the colonial agency were neither in charge of hiring labourers, nor did they choose the members of their gangs.[465] These headmen also did not control any finances of the members of their gangs. They were asked to keep track of workers' details in the gang pass book, which contained all of a gang's official activities, such as any fines accumulated.[466] Furthermore, headmen employed by the colonial agency were not in charge of the wages of the men working in their gangs. In 1903, the Government Transport Department announced that all labourers supplied from the department would 'be paid off by the Transport Officer at Sekondi'.[467] At the completion of a work contract they had to travel from Tarkwa to the coastal region to pick up their wages from the Transport Department, where they had been 'deposited with the Transport Officer monthly by the mining company that engaged them'.[468] However, rather than allowing a third party to handle their wages, each individual member of a gang presented his slips from mine management directly to a transport officer, which stated the exact amount of wages owed to him. Each man could claim his personal pay directly from colonial authorities and could approve or appeal any deductions at the transport offices.[469] In addition, the wages

[464] CUL RCMS 139/10/3, No. 661/06.
[465] CUL RCMS 139/6/26, Manifold Book, July–August 1903, 'Chief Officer of the Transport Department to the Assistant Transport Officer at Obuasi'.
[466] CUL RCMS 139/12/10.
[467] Ibid.
[468] RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1903, s. 4. See, also, CUL RCMS 139/12/10.
[469] Ibid.

of headmen varied 'with their experience' and they were set to be not much more significant than the wages of unskilled labourers, at first:[470]

On first appointment	1/- pay	6d subsistence.
After 6 months, if satisfactory	1/3 pay	6d subsistence.
After 1 year	1/6 pay	6d subsistence.
Captains	at 2/- pay	6d subsistence.[471]

In a further infraction of the power of headmen, Migeod and the transport officers started to mitigate quarrels between the labourers and increasingly ineffectual leaders. These were disputes often connected to various forms of credits, such as cloth to cash. One of the letters shows a financial dispute over debt between headman Johnny and Kaiwo:

> I have gone carefully into the case of apparent theft of cloth by Headman Johnny And herewith what Johnny has to say in defending himself. He says Kaiwo owed him 6/- and paid him 2/6 leaving a balance of 3/6. He has been demanding the balance for a long time but Kaiwo always took refuge in procrastination; till at last he told him that Lasana of Baioo Gang owned him a certain amount [and] will pay him on their return from Salago. Lasana was at that time at Jato Zongo. On their return Johnny found that Lasana owed Kaiwo nothing. In order to get the money Johnny told Kaiwo to bring anything he can get to put for pawn. And he gave him 1 cloth in the presence of Blackie [and] Dirty water[,] all of Baioo Gang. Johnny has however, sent the cloth to Himan [and] Abrampon, condition that Kaiwo pays the 3/6 before Abram gives him the cloth.[472]

The withholding of wages was damaging not only because of the diminished earnings to which it led, but also because labourers were often obligated, at least informally, to reach a particular threshold before they could conclude their contracts with headmen. Karthar, a worker at Nsawam, experienced this sort of debt-bondage with his headman. He shared the following with the Government Transport Department:

> Please I beg to let you [know] that one Headman call Dahai take the money from Karthar. After Dahai do take the money which £1-10 Karthar to keep it from me and I must be there 2 months after. [473]

[470] Ibid.
[471] Ibid.
[472] CUL RCMS 139/16, 'Transport Clerk Atebubu to Chief Officer of the Transport Department'.
[473] CUL RCMS 139/16, 'Karthar to Chief Officer of the Transport Department'.

Connected to the endeavour of increasing security in the wage labour market, the department also made closer efforts to eliminate competition and foster cooperation between the mines for the purpose of reducing average labour expenditures.

The Government Transport Department and the Desertion Dilemma

The Government Transport Department assumed a mediatory role not only between headmen and labourers but also between individual companies in and around Tarkwa, Tamsu, and Abosso. It has already been mentioned that, given persistent shortfalls in the supply of labour, mine management had developed the destructive habit of offering cash advances haphazardly. However, even with the input of Chief Officer Migeod, cooperation continued to be elusive. There were structural reasons that made mining recruitment an uneven challenge for the various mining companies. The introduction of the Government Railway was a great help to the mining sector, but at the same time not all companies benefited equally from its presence. Tracks ran through certain properties and not others, with a serious impact on the ability of concessions located further away to recruit. As a result, those firms feared losing their labourers by introducing lowered wages before other companies had done so. For example, in 1903 the General Manager of the Prestea concession, where there was no connection to the railway until 1908, wrote to Migeod expressing his concerns:

> Although I informed you, that it was my intention, to lower the wages to the scale agreed upon, by the Mine Managers Association, have not yet done so as there seems to be considerable uncertainty amongst the members of the Association and until the reduction is unanimously agreed upon and date fixed for it coming into force, I cannot be the one to start it, as it would result in my loosing all my best men. In event of the reduction, not taking place of course I will pay you the extra 3d for any boy you send me.[474]

[474] CUL RCMS 139/12/31.

Mr. Toomer's conundrum points to the difficulty of getting gold mines located close to one another to work together.[475] Here was an individual who was managing one of the most successful companies at the time, and who was also a registered member of the Mine Managers' Association. Still, he continued to distribute wages higher than the rates agreed upon by the organisation.

Competitive recruiting was such a serious issue because it fuelled desertion rates. Letters preserved as part of Migeod's private papers, some written by workers and addressed to Migeod personally, and others produced by mine managers in response to the allegations of labourers, reveal that there were few other remedies to this 'evil', as while the legal penalties were quite harsh for absconders, most of them remained elusive to the colonial judicial system.[476] In actuality, when labourers felt wronged by an employer they almost invariably tried to resolve the situation or to complete their contracts if they still had outstanding credit with the company.[477]

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[475] In contrast to the Ashanti region to the north, these mines lay within a limited and tight urbanising space, which was conducive to 'job hopping' among mineworkers, an issue at the root of overly-competitive wage rates.

[476] Unsurprisingly, due to the form of communication, in none of these letters were labourers reprimanded. Instead, the letters mostly showed Migeod warning employers who were already in a disadvantageous position when it came to recruiting. In one instance he reminded the manager of the Tamsu mine about the consequences of such actions of future mobilisation efforts: 'I should much regret that any misunderstanding should arise between yourself and the labourers, but should like to see the work carried out in harmony and with good feeling. I trust therefore you may see your way to removing any misapprehension that exist in the labourers minds, failing which they have informed me they will all leave the mine […]. This would be a regrettable incident. It would be exceedingly difficult to find other men … and as desertion after the first few days rarely occurs without a solid grievance, since the men know they are liable imprisonment in their case is not a good one. If their case should prove a good one, they may at last claim full pay for every day they have been at the mine'. CUL RCMS 139/4, 'Letter to the General Manager of W.W.A.M Tansoo'.

[477] There were naturally issues that undermined making money, or at least that kept them from being able to work towards such a goal. In 1903 a group of African carriers sought the assistance of the transport officers as their employer failed to supply them with rations of food on Sunday and denied them any credit. The headman of the gang took their complaint to the Transport Department by way of a messenger, forcing Chief Officer Migeod to send a warning to the accused manager in East Akim: 'Sir, A carrier has been sent to me by the headman working for you to say that they do not receive subsistence for every day in the month. As this is compulsory whether they work or not, I shall be obliged if you will issue the necessary

Migeod regularly struggled to mitigate some of the tensions between contract men who had been hired through his department and employers in the mines, though his soft intervention strategy was only an option for a small segment of the labour force in the mine, and despite the fact that the men choosing this option were not interested in desertion to begin with. For example, in 1906, a gang contracted to the Offin River Company in Dunkwa by the Government Transport Department wrote to Migeod describing an agitated white foreman who was prone to beating them on a regular basis:

> Sir,
> We beg most respectfully to report you, how Offin River Company are troubling us; we care working, and one of the whiteman, always beating us, and always get fever.[478]

The gang also reported abuse on the part of the clerks working on the property:

> Also the clerk who taking our time, not keeping our time properly; he also say if our time finish, we can't get no pay. So, if we never report you in time before we come for our pay; you will say that when we come here, we never do no work […]. So we are obliged to let you know all this, as to write our big master or the Captain here, to less our trouble.[479]

They had already been working for the company for at least a month at the time of their complaint and had, therefore, accumulated credit with the company.

A similar pattern is seen in 1903 when, following a confrontation with his employer, a headman by the name of John Aggrey made his way from the mining centre down to Sekondi on the coast to give testimony about his gang's troubles at work. Aggrey's complaints were twofold. First, he accused the newly hired General Manager of the Tamsu Mine of making excessive demands of the labourers, and Migeod seemed to believe his claims.[480] He warned the manager that, 'Judging from the paysheets I already

directions that it be not stopped again. If any of the carriers require an advance will you please also let them have it, changing same in pay sheet'. CUL RCMS 139/4, 'Chief Officer of the Transport Department to General Manager E. Axim'.
[478] CUL RCMS 139/16, 'Headman Charles Kofi to the Pay Master'.
[479] Ibid.
[480] CUL RCMS 139/4, 'Chief Officer of the Transport Department to General Manager W.W.A.M Tamsu', Letter Books, 5 January 1903.

have, they have been worked sufficiently hard; and I should not care to see in the rent pay sheets — those for October — that they had been unable to keep to anything approaching fulltime'.[481] Aggrey's main grievance was anchored in the fact that he and the other labourers were not going to receive their proper wages. His second claim was that his gang was being fined for refusing to work underground, even though this had not been stipulated in their contracts.[482] According to Migeod, they 'are surface men, and underground work is entirely optional to them. Should they undertake it, they receive 3d a day extra pay'.[483] The behaviour of the manager in question was, therefore, a clear infraction of the Government Transport Department's contract. Nevertheless, here again, it was not Migeod's intervention that stopped the men from leaving, but rather the fact that they had money to lose.[484]

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[481] Ibid.

[482] Ibid. The contract of government mineworkers articulated that underground work was entirely voluntary for workers, and that they were to be paid a higher rate of wages if they chose to work underground. The Transport Circular No. 3, which was published in the *Government Gazette* on 31 December 1903, read: 'Labourers employed underground on the mines to receive 3d more a day extra pay' and that such work was 'not to be compulsory'. CUL RCMS 139/12/10.

[483] Ibid.

[484] There were additional instances in which it was not monetary gain leading inquiries, but grave abuse that led men to the transport officers: In 1903 Migeod had to reprimand managers at the Anfargah Mining Company following multiple accounts of brutality. When five government subcontract labourers were 'struck with some weapon on the mines and wounded', he declared that he was unwilling to force them to return to work (There was a strike through this text in the original correspondence). CUL RCMS 139/4/30. 'I am informed that there are some other labourers seriously injured at Tarkwa. These will also receive their pay when they arrive. I will let you know later of the remaining absentees as I am not finished with all of them yet', Ibid. The case against the employers was convincing because other African workers had had similar experiences on that concession. Consequently, Migeod did not hesitate to let the manager know that the workers would be paid for their services despite leaving before the proper end of their contract. Tension on this property came to a climax in August 1903 after another bout of extreme violence and insensitivity at Anfargah Mining Company. Contract men sent here by the Government Transport Department left the property without any notice. The details of the incident leading to this strike were outlined in Migeod's letter to Philip Poore Esquire, who was managing the mine: 'Sir, I beg to inform you that a letter has been forwarded to my office signed by some of the headmen at your mine, in which they complain of excessive tasks, and also more particularly of being beaten with a stick, and being prevented from searching for the body of a man who drowned himself. Judging by the letter I should say you must have been having some trouble with the labourers. I however, hope by now things have quieted down; but I trust you will inquire into the men's complaints, and adjust them so far as they are reasonable, for should by any chance Anfargah acquire a bad name, whether justifiably or not amongst the natives, it will be practically

Perhaps it was the limited potential of Migeod and his transport officers in furthering cooperation between mining entrepreneurs, combined with the minimal impact of their soft power on curbing desertion rates, which ignited a desire to pass legislation to tackle these issues once and for all. Following the conflict with the Mr. Toomer of the Prestea Mines, Migeod consulted with the Colonial Secretary:

> I understood it was generally agreed that the member of the [Mine Managers' Association] would not compete against each other, but when I saw Mr. Toomer here, he said if he wanted labourers quickly he would go about it his own way, and he distinctively refused to recruit on even terms so long as he wanted men. Mr. Toomer's action being detrimental to the public good, and also an obstacle to my endeavour to reduce wages for the coming year.[485]

In his frustration, Migeod asked that 'legislation in the subject may be hastened.'[486] Until such a point was reached, the actions of a single individual such as Toomer would offset all efforts made by the Government Transport Department to lower the rate of wages in Wassa. In Migeod the Mine Managers' Association had finally found an ally within the ranks of the administration to help them introduce increased labour control.

Chief Officer Migeod: A Colonial 'Man on the Spot'[487]

According to Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, during the formative years of colonial rule it was often European 'men on the spot' who developed 'colonial policies and procedures in response to local circumstances'.[488] 'The "rules" of colonialism had not yet been set or developed', therefore these men had to, and did, practice ad hoc colonialism, usually with the help of loyal African intermediaries.[489] Embedded in issues which at first seemed of

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impossible to get any to go there in future'. CUL RCMS 139/6/26, Manifold Book, July–August 1903. It is not entirely clear whether the men stood to lose any money at all.

[485] CUL RCMS 139/4, 'Chief Officer of the Transport Department to Colonial Secretary', Letter Books, 15 December 1903.

[486] Ibid.

[487] Lawrance, Osborn and Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks*, p. 13.

[488] Ibid.

[489] Ibid.

little direct concern to officials in Accra, in 1903 Migeod had the potential of having a lasting impact on policies surrounding labour relations and control in colonial Ghana.

Looking at his background and formal upbringing, Migeod sits comfortably among the ranks of colonial administrators at the time.[490] Migeod was born on 9 August 1872 near the rapidly developing rural parish of Chislehurst, Kent near Folkstone, where he was privately educated.[491] He gained some military experience, but unlike many high-ranking colonial agents in Accra, his resumé did not demonstrate a series of expeditions followed by prestigious promotions. Rather, in 1889 he entered the Royal Navy Pay Department as a clerk and, four years later in 1893, he was promoted to the modest position of Assistant Paymaster.[492] In May 1898 Migeod resigned from the Navy to take up his first assignment in Africa, in the West African transportation services. By 1 September 1898 he had taken up a post as Assistant Transport Officer in northern Nigeria for the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), and less than a year later he was appointed to Supervisor of Customs in the Gold Coast Colony. A position as Assistant Transport Officer for the Ashanti Field Force followed a few months later. He then worked as supervisor of customs in Accra.[493] In September 1901 he accepted a position as Chief Officer of the Gold Coast Transport Office, a position he held for almost two decades.

Migeod, like many other colonial agents, missionaries, or laymen residing in remote parts of Africa, quickly became engrossed with his new surroundings, enjoying his personal engagement with Africans, and following a multitude of interests in

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[490] T. Williamson and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *Gold Coast Diaries: Chronicles of Political Officers in West Africa, 1900–1919* (London, 2000).
[491] G. Maier, *African Dinosaurs Unearthed: The Tendaguru Expeditions (Life of the Past)* (Indiana, 2003), p. 165.
[492] See Great Britain Colonial Office, *The Colonial Office List for 1920* (London, 1920), p. 700.
[493] Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of British Africa, 1870–1914*, p. 273 n.

language, culture, and science. Judging by his published books and articles, he was actively engaged in a number of academic fields, including anthropology, linguistics, mathematics, plant science, and history; not unusual for this period. He authored several books, including *The Mende Language (1908)*, *Languages of West Africa*, 2 vols. (1911), *Hausa Grammar* (1914), and many others. A number of his articles were published in the Royal Anthropological Society's *Man* journal: 'Antiquity of Man in West Africa', 'A Mende Dance', 'The Racial Elements concerned in the First Siege of Troy', and 'Supposed Duodecimal System in Burum Language'.[494] Later in his career Migeod also became a member of several academic societies dedicated to the topics of culture and society, and he was a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, the African Society, and the Folklore Society. Thanks to a chance encounter with American paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson, we have this amusing description of Migeod as a scrawny and pretentious Africa-phile, which was written on 20 April 1927 in the context of a whimsical private letter to a close confidant:

> Before I went I had been at the Royal Geographical with 3-initials Migeod, Esq. — he calls it Mee-zoh, but many's [sic] the unsuspecting lad who has addressed him as Mr. My God! This Migeod is a quiet dried up fellah that looks as if he might have a fairly sticky past tucked away somewhere — week-ends at Brighton (where all the beautiful & damned go with the not-even-handsome but equally-damned) or that sort of thing — but otherwise neither here nor there, as they say in Nigeria. Well, oddly enough Nigeria is to the point, for I will say that he knows his Benin as well as the Obi himself does. This little prune has tramped right across Africa on the equator (& that's a fair jaunt, mind you) [and] then not yet sufficiently fed up he tramped right back on the parallel 5° South, which is even worse. He thinks Lake Tchad is the height of civilization and he's made his tea out of water from the various sources of the Nile. The upper Congo rather bores him, but the Gold Coast is amusin' because there's some jolly good snipe-huntin' theyah [*sic*]. He's never had any trouble with lions or leopard — oh! Of course he's had to kill one now & then that came bothering him, like you would a mosquito — but the fellows that get messed by those vermin go lookin' for them, & he hasn't lost any lions. Just what he has lost that he goes wandering through tropical Africa & can't wait to get back he doesn't know, himself.[495]

[494] The Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, *Man a Monthly Record of Anthropological Science Nos. 1–138* (London, 1917).
[495] G. G. Simpson, *Simple Curiosity: Letters from George Gaylord Simpson to His Family, 1921–1970* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 75.

These words were written in the context of a private letter.

Migeod's power, respectively the power of the Government Transport Department, was precisely in his autonomy from Government House in Accra.[496] However, he increasingly came to the attention of high-ranked colonial authorities as his department encroached on issues related to state intervention for the purpose of labour control. The pinnacle of the partnership between the Government Transport Department and the Mine Managers' Association was in their lobbying efforts to pass the Concessions Labour Ordinance starting in 1903, which called for individually registering all labourers in the gold mines, a policy that had already been endorsed in South Africa in 1895.[497]

4. 1. The Concessions Labour Ordinance of 1903

Though never enacted as law, the Concessions Labour Bill (1903) was devised to provide a strict and structured alternative to what many foreign employers perceived as the lax conditions of labour control in colonial Ghana, governed by the Master and Servant Act as they were. On paper the master and servant was a labour-disciplining tool of the first degree. It had been developed to regulate relations between employers and employees in the colony and its protectorate from the nineteenth century.[498] However, as in other parts

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496 The duty of the Government Transport Department had to be considered under two heads: 'financially, and from its practical utility to the colony both from a mining point of view and from a Government point of view'. Regardless of its contributions to the colonial state, it could only exist so long as it raised its own finances. RHO MS 7ss.14 s.10, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1902 (1) s. 3.

497 In the light of failed attempts to stop the mining companies from competing for labour on the Rand, in 1895 the Chamber of Mines persuaded the Volksraad to enact a pass law in certain 'labour districts', which would feed the gold mines. Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy*, p. 42.

498 *Parliamentary Papers 1901* [Cd. 575], p. 39: Law and Regulations affecting Lands and Mines and the Labour of Natives.

of Africa, the majority of the laws were in fact designed to benefit employers. Desertion was named as a legal offence punishable by fines or hard labour. Labourers could be sentenced to between two and three months of hard labour for breaches of contracts. Alternatively, they could be fined between £5 and £25 for the same offence. Furthermore, as shown earlier, it was even possible to force men to complete a contract at a workplace they had left without any intention of ever returning.[499]

At the same time, in Ghana the colonial state took a different path in utilising master and servants laws. In contrast to East Africa or South Africa, colonial governments in British West Africa did not rigorously implement labour laws in a way that would benefit European employers by forcibly keeping men in the labour force for extended periods of time.[500] They were rarely and irregularly implemented. In actuality, only an unlucky few men were subjected to the harsh penalties under the Master and Servant Act during the period under investigation, to the frustration of employers in Wassa.

The members of the Mine Managers' Association and Migeod believed that the new bill could deter desertion and restrict the movement of labourers more generally. They complained that 'they have absolutely no control over their men who run away from one company to another and this entails heavy expense'.[501] If a labourer had run away it was often difficult to identify the offender and identification was generally only possible with the cooperation of a compliant headman.[502] If a headman was in favour of

[499] Chapter 2, pp. 116-9.
[500] Dumett and Johnson, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in the Gold Coast Colony', in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa*, p. 92; Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 225.
[501] CUL RCMS 139/12/11, 'Memorandum on the Concession Labour Bill'.
[502] Ibid.

absconding, however, there was no way to 'prevent whole gangs of boys leaving one mine to go home or obtaining work at another after having promised to work a definite period'.[503] Out of this frustration arose an appeal to the Chief Justice of the colony for legislation to give employers tighter controls on the labour force in 1903.

Though mining entrepreneurs had sent previous proposals for the implementation of pass laws to the Colonial Office, it was the actions of Chief Officer Migeod that first confronted officials in Accra with this suggestion in 1903. That same year the Government Transport Office had initiated a registration and identification programme for its own labourers, 'which was only applied to those persons who sign on for definite periods'.[504] Migeod explained his department's process of enlisting contract men as follows:

> The system of taking prints of all the ten fingers and then reducing the result to a representative numerical fraction is too cumbersome, and I consider, perfectly impracticable in this country, owing to the extremely few clerks that would be sufficiently accurate to perform the same. In fact I might go even further and say that as absolute accuracy is essential there are none to perform the tabulation. All that is done therefore is to take the right thumb, with a rolled impression, in printers ink. Of course, the comparatively small number of persons registered renders such a proceeding possible.

Contrary to standard practice in the British Isles, fingerprints were not just supplemented with the worker's name, but certain tribal markers were recorded, too. A counterfoil of such a certificate is kept in Migeod's records:[505]

> As against the system established in England it must be borne in mind that there is a natural division of the population here into tribes who are unmistakably distinct. The actual table of registrations in use in the department is as follows: Adopted name; own name' official number; country or town; height; marks; apparent age; right thumb mark. Every individual item may be inexactly entered owning [to] carelessness or other causes, but the thumb mark, if clear, cannot fail and in only one case out of 3,000 have I mistaken a man through similarity of thumb mark owning to a defective impression, and a further scrutiny of the ridges revealed difference.[506]

[503] Ibid.
[504] PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1908, s. 4.
[505] CUL RCMS 139/12/40.
[506] Ibid.

Using language particular to that period, the form asked for country name; other name; sex; age or apparent age; race or tribe; trade or profession; personal characteristics; height; colour; tribal marks; other marks; whether stout or slender built; as well as a signature from those workers who were literate.

Nevertheless, achieving colony-wide regulations would become a goal of the Chief Officer in the following months and years. This pilot project soon became little more than a stepping-stone for the ambitious administrator, though many of the strategies picked up at this small scale were also proposed for future registration schemes.[507] For example, in July of 1903, just one month after the Mine Managers' Association had appealed to the Governor Matthew Nathan for the approval of a pass law, Migeod submitted a Transport Circular to be reprinted in the *Government Gazette*. It included a point on the 'Regulations for Registration of Labour', which would have become law had the circular been published. Under these regulations it was not just the department's own contract men that would be registered; rather, according to a draft of the circular held in his private papers, the proposed rule pertained to 'black and coloured males and females not belonging to any of the tribes inhabiting the Gold Coast Colony or hinterland who come to work in the colony as carriers, cooks, artisans, etc.',[508] in other words the bulk of

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[507] In 1908 the Government Transport Department took registration even further. It implemented a policy of not just recording the enlistment of carriers individually with their thumbprints, but also making them wear labels with unique numbers on them while at work. An official report explained the benefit of such identification to the Europeans put in charge of them: 'For the first time tallies have been issued to the permanent carriers belonging to the Transport Department. As every man is known to the officers of the department, they are of no special value from a departmental point of view, though officers travelling with these carriers find the fact that every man bears a number of considerable assistance for identification. Seeing that nearly every man bears two names, his own personal name which his friends use, and his adopted name taken only for dealings with Europeans, which he not infrequently forgets as he has probably changed it for every employers who he has served, the use of a tally becomes apparent'. Registration aimed primarily at bringing desertion to a halt. However, Migeod contended that in addition the labourer 'feels that he becomes an established employee of the department and takes pride in the fact'. Ibid., s. 5.

[508] CUL RCMS 139/12/26, Regulations for Registration of Labour, Transport Circular No. 3, Official Papers on Labour Policy, 11 July 1903.

the contract labourers in the colony and its protectorates. If approved these labourers would have been required to fill out a certificate at one of the transport offices, to be handed over to the employer upon getting hired.[509] Labourers would be identified on handover of their certificates, and the Government Transport Department would take on the job of issuing these documents. Nevertheless, Migeod was not successful in getting it approved. Governor Nathan only signed the circular for the *Government Gazette* of August 1903 once this point had been taken out.[510] At the same time, it was not a total loss either, since this bold move seems to have served as a catalyst for the Governor agreeing to review an independent bill that went in a similar direction. The Concessions Labour Bill (1903) was drafted and put before the Governor in consultation with the Chief Justice of the Gold Coast not long after.

In William B. Griffith, who served as Chief Justice of the Gold Coast from 1895 to 1911, the mine managers and Migeod may have found one of the fairest reviewers possible in the higher ranks of government within the colony. Griffith was the eldest son of Governor Griffith, who had been a pioneer in a number of other matters of economic development, and who had played a central role in the recent construction of the railway. Nonetheless, even the Chief Justice was dismayed by the idea of putting the mining industry at the forefront of colonial economic policy. The scheme was extremely controversial due to its cost, both monetarily and in terms of the manpower that it demanded, and because of the degree of ongoing involvement it required from colonial

[509] Ibid.
[510] Governor Nathan had to deal with significant political pressure from the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society and their opposition to many of the demands made by mining entrepreneurs. See C. Newbury, 'Nathan, Sir Matthew (1862–1939)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., January 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35189, accessed on 29 February 2012].

institutions. After considering the provisions of the bill on 25 March 1904, Griffith sent a lengthy response to Migeod, with various detailed points of critique.

Though it was not entirely evident which kinds of labourers would be affected by the law,[511] the bill was certainly directed towards all of the wage labourers in the mining industry.[512] Technically voluntary, any person wishing to find a wage job in Wassa would have to acquire a certificate of registration in order to work. Nevertheless, the supporter of the bill did not regard the number of registrations as a problem, because the scheme would be self-funding. To ensure that neither the government nor employers in the mining sector incurred any costs from this experiment, the workers themselves would provide financial support. In order to receive their papers labourers would be required to pay one shilling. Indeed, most of the bill's provisions were framed in terms favourable to European employers. The certificate would be given to an employer once a labourer had entered a contract with a company; indicating that the worker was in formal employment.[513] His certificate would only be handed back to him once the employer decided that the contract had come to an end, or once it had otherwise come to a legal

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[511] Another reason why the bill was rejected was because it lacked precision. Griffith noticed a lack of provision to stop the bill from being applied to European workers and African clerks higher up in the mining hierarchy. Chief Justice Griffith insisted that 'the scheme cannot, in the circumstances in which it will be placed, be worked with that smoothness and accuracy which will be necessary to ensure success'. A technical weakness of the bill was that it appeared to be too far-reaching. The Colonial Secretary wrote to Migeod on 6 November 1903 to point out that the bill would have to cover not only workers in the mine, but also those employed for the railway or the Public Works Department. Otherwise, 'all trace of [the worker] will be lost'. If other wage labourers were not included, around Tarkwa especially, 'the value of the ordinance will be completely nullified'. 'The evil complained of is confined to mining labourers but the Government go further and provide for the registration of all persons employed on a concession area, from mine managers and medical men to clerks and cooks. Of course if the Bill is made to apply to native clerks it must be extended to European employers. But there is no need to extend it to any clerks The Bill could, think without difficulty be made to apply solely to mining labourers in the same way the Master and Servant Ordinance is made to apply solely to certain classes of servants and I will assume that the Bill will affect mining labourers only'. Ibid.

[512] Ibid.

[513] Ibid.

conclusion.[514] Griffith took issue with the balance of power in this scenario. He expressed serious concern over the extent of the legal exploitative power in the hands of mine management once they had managed to get all African contract workers in the mines to register. The proposed system shared many similarities to indentured coolie labour; it was even frank about its intention not only just to punish absconders, but to hold them in the labour force. 'We may eliminate one point', Griffith declared, 'registration will not prevent labourers returning home if they wish'.[515] He went on to insist that 'I think we may assume that there is no objection to labourers quitting any employment at the termination of their agreement'.[516]

Griffith imagined a situation wherein negligent managers and dismissive African clerks would prevent men leaving a position and finding new work by refusing to return their passes. There would naturally also be intentional cases of force:

> Were these clauses locally carried out they could work no harm. But I do not believe that it will be so carried out. It will constantly happen that the labourer will be kept out of his certificate. Some few managers will exercise scrupulous care in promptly restoring certificates on the termination of the agreements; but many will not trouble themselves much about it. The matter will be often left to subordinates and there is no person more inconsiderate and more callous where a labourer is concerned that the ordinary native clerk. The labourer will ask for his certificate. He will be out off and told to come next day as the manager is away or busy or that the clerk has not got time to look through the bundle of certificates and that way 2 or 3 days will be lost.[517]

Although there were controls in place to keep this sort of thing from happening, the judge did not think that they had been thought through carefully enough and that there were many ways in which employers could take advantage of their new powers:

> No doubt provision is made in clause 23 to prevent this very thing. But the native will rarely seek the protection of this clause. He will not be refused the certificate, he will only be told to come again.[518]

[514] Ibid.
[515] Ibid.
[516] Ibid.
[517] Ibid.
[518] Ibid.

Griffith foresaw the abuse of African mining labourers in the gold mines becoming rampant, and eventually forcing the government to take on a more persistent and large-scale role in the administration of the region:

> Again too mining managers are only human with a weapon in their hands as the custody of the certificate of registration it will be contrary to human nature if they and the labourer do not often disagree as to when the agreement comes to an end. I have no special reason to lay stress on this point but unless the labourers' interest are looked after by some special authority they will probable suffer in this connection and all the more because of the frequency of procedure District Commissioners will not be able to give to registration the careful attention which will be required and will have to delegate much of the work to the native clerks whose strong point is not accuracy.[519]

The bill favoured foreign employers too extensively:

> I doubt whether anyone except the mines and the Transport Officer are satisfied with workability of the scheme proposed. I gathered that the more Sir Matthew Nathan considered the subject the less he was inclined to press the bill and I think that the Attorney General would have come to the second reading with a very open mind on the question whether the scheme would prove anyone but the mining companies and the transport officer have a good word to say to the bill.[520]

As a colonial official himself, Griffith approached Chief Officer Migeod's request with a hint of disbelief. Having established an agency to serve both the mining industry and the government, Migeod had drawn a considerable degree of suspicion onto himself for going to such lengths to identify with foreign employers in the mines, lobbying for labour control as he did:

> And without some special protection for natives other than the transport officer who, as an employer himself, would be naturally in the side of mining companies, and without such a staff for carrying the scheme into execution as would guarantee its smooth working I fear that mining labour would get this bad name. It is easy to say, these fears are exaggerated but it must be admitted that registration of uneducated native labourers everywhere regarded as an experiment not to be tried without great deliberation and without ample safeguards that the remedy does not prove worse than the disease. [521]

The Chief Justice advised that, 'before any legislation like the present Bill is proceeded with the Government should give more attention to the question whether registration of mining labour can be effectively carried out with the staff which in the existing

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[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid.
[521] Ibid.

circumstance of the Colony, can be afforded'.[522] Thus, not only was Migeod's credibility in question, but also the judge did not think that the Government Transport Department was physically equipped to handle the task of dealing with thousands of potentially agitated labourers. It would take a specialised department to handle the passes and to protect African workers from issues such as indefinite indentureship by their employers.[523] Furthermore, this type of protection was not a one-off deal. It would have to be guaranteed for the distant future. In other words, even though the cost of registration fell upon the labourers, the scheme still had to be upheld by colonial institutions. On the one hand Griffith proclaimed that the African worker did not know how to protect himself sufficiently in the face of British courts; that he, 'with his customary experience of native ways […] will not consider [injustice] sufficient cause to call in the aid of clause 23'.[524] On the other hand, he also warned against the promotion of colonial courts as a place to settle workplace disputes. Labour relations in West Africa had attracted little formal litigation in the past and any steps taken to encourage masses of African workers to rely on colonial institutions to fix their problems undermined the prevailing doctrine of indirect rule. According to Griffith, top (the state) to bottom (to labour) intervention ignored African 'tribal authority', which loomed large in the colonial system of indirect rule. The furthering of an ideology of citizenship was not a path that officials in Accra wanted to take:

> And it would be highly inadvisable on the part of the Government to attract the attention of the native to this clause. At present, happily, there is hardly any litigation between employers and employed. But the native is by nature very litigious and it only needs encouragement to make him over on the lookout for causes of action against his employers. In fact, to bring about the conditions popularly supported to obtain in the oldest West African Colony.[525]

[522] Ibid.
[523] Ibid.
[524] Ibid.
[525] Ibid.

Griffith feared that over time the government would be cornered into dealing with an insurmountable number of court cases.

Connected to an ideology of traditional African society, Griffith also questioned whether African labourers would cope well with free market measures:

> As it is we are not quite clear what view the native labourer will take of registration and how he will respond but the native expects from the whiteman absolute justice and if the employer treats him with something less than that, and if the native has to wait about at the Transport Office for registration till he can be attended to, and if he meets with difficulty in getting a duplicate of his certificate, for the certificate will be often bona fide lost, he will soon throw up work or personate, and mining labour will get a bad name in the country.[526]

Far from wanting to eliminate African intermediaries, he suggested that more African authorities, African clerks, be employed to oversee African contract workers. To reduce the extent of desertion, he proposed that 'a native (who would more easily recognize native faces than a European) be employed to constantly inspect labourers at the different mines, paying special attention to all newcomers'.[527]

The system of labour control that was being suggested to high-ranking officials of the Gold Coast government with the Concessions Labour Ordinance targeted the desertion problem; however, in the eyes of the Chief Justice it employed 'drastic measures' to do so.[528] Griffith was not entirely unsympathetic to the free-rider problem, though he was not entirely convinced about the extent of the problem, and noted the lack of empirical data to make the point.[529] In the end, he put forward that 'the mining companies are themselves much to blame':[530]

> The transfer of services from one mine to another is due almost if not entirely to the advance systems and this transfer of services will be reduced according as advances are reduced. To some

[526] Ibid.
[527] Ibid.
[528] Ibid.
[529] Griffith suspected mining companies had blown up this issue, and pointed to a lack of concrete statistical information to back up their claims. Ibid.
[530] Ibid.

> extent the mining companies have the remedy in their own hands; if they agree amongst themselves to lower the advance in there will be fewer peripatetic labourers.[531]

Although he did not give much thought to how smaller advances would diminish general rates of recruitment, or that for many labourers sizeable cash advances may have been an attraction of most importance, the Chief Justice went to lengths to argue that the mining industry could solve their own problems:

> I do not think that a case has been made out for registrations of labour, I think that for the evils so far brought to light by the miners use have remedies already to hand, that before registration of labour is seriously considered more information should be obtained [...].[532]

Mine managers, he concluded, would have to continue trying to deal with the high cost of labour without colonial assistance.

As the presiding member of the Supreme Court on the Gold Coast, Griffith found the Master and Servant Ordinance, including the amendment of 1902, to be perfectly adequate.[533] In his letter to Migeod, he informed the latter that 'the Governor is personally opposed to the principles of the bill both in theory and practice'.[534] The Governor's recommendation to the Colonial Secretary was that 'it should not be proceeded with',[535] and this opinion was further strengthened by other powerful opponents, such as the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, which as representatives of British cotton merchants in West Africa had taken to working with small-scale farmers by this point in time.[536] Therefore, in 1905 the Concessions Labour Ordinance did not

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[531] Ibid.
[532] Ibid.
[533] The amendment saw special provisions being developed with respect to advances, however this improvement was also built upon a foundation of non-competition between the various companies in Wassa. See subsection 39a and 39c of Ordinance 12 of 1902, The Master and Servant Ordinance, vol ii, p. 897.
[534] Ibid.
[535] Ibid.
[536] The Manchester Chamber of Commerce, which represented British cotton merchants who at the time had developed collaborative relationships with small-scale farmers, was also against the implementation of the bill. PRO CO 98/14, Report on the Transport Department for the Year 1904, s. 4.

become law. Instead, mine managers, still desiring some form of registrations, agreed to build their own system from the ground up, whereby they would 'voluntarily make their workers take out certificates issued from the Government Transport Department, and should not employ anybody without one'.[537] The new system proposed that

> Any person who has engaged labour of any description and is desirous of obtaining a written contract can, at Sekondi, have the same drawn up at the Transport Office, where in addition every labourer will have his description recorded for the purpose of future identification
>
> The transport office does not undertake to take any labourer who breaks his agreement but will render all the assistance we can to the employer to do so.
>
> With respect to Kroomen in particular, any person engaging a Krooman in the Colony, without ascertaining whether he had completed his agreement with his former employers, does so at his own risk, and renders himself liable to prosecution under the Master and Servant Ordinance.
>
> The fee for signing on and rendering a man's description is 6d a head. Similar arrangements will be made at an early date for the registration of native labourers at Accra, Cape Coast Castle, Axim and Tarkwa.[538]

Subsequently, interest in the matter quickly declined so that the Transport Department 'never issued a single form'.[539] This was likely due to the system now punishing the gold mines for their competitive recruitment practices, rather than disciplining labour. With this turn the importance of the Government Transport Department in assisting the mining industry gradually faded.[540]

Headman emerged newly with European demand for labour, though as a matter of negotiation rather than invention. Nevertheless, as this chapter has shown, there were concerted efforts within the mining industry, but also by colonial agents to streamline the

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[537] Ibid.
[538] CUL RCMS 139/12, 'Draft of Transport Circular No. 4'.
[539] Ibid.
[540] After 1905 employers in the mines only used the recruitment services of the Transport Department in times of dire need. In 1908 Migeod stated that, 'Application is seldom made except at a time of local stringency. This occurred in September when work was begun on the Tarkwa-Prestea Railway, and a good many requisitions from the mines came in. Mendis were principally supplied, and nearly all went to work underground. Two gangs, numbering 50 in all, were collected by this department at Coomassie for mines in the Tarkwa district'. PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1908, s. 8.

organisation of labourers in the mining sector. The ultimate aim of the proposals put forward by the Mine Managers' Association and the Government Transport Department was to adapt the processes of indigenous recruitment, whilst eliminating actual notions of indigenous authority. In spite of an attempt to pass strict labour laws in colonial Ghana, the Governor rejected the Concessions Labour Ordinance, and as a result labour recruitment and control would unequivocally remain a pursuit dominated by African intermediaries, functionally outside the regulatory framework of the state for several years to come. Some of these intermediaries, namely the career headmen, depended on foreign capital to recruit; others were subject to extensive foreign regulation, namely the headmen employed by the Government Transport Department. Yet, as the next chapter demonstrates, there also arose a population of independent labour recruiters who used their personal wealth to supply the mines with men.

CHAPTER 5. Independent Headmen: Indigenous Responses to the Recruitment Business

As the last chapter indicated part of the shortfall in Kru contract labour was met by the Government Transport Department. At the same time, a growing number of indigenous independent labour recruiters also helped to ameliorate the labour shortage. These autonomous recruiters are the most clear-cut piece of evidence of indirect recruitment as the product of indigenous economic agency. As European mine managers struggled to develop a cheaper and more disciplined wage labour market, they were not able to turn down the men recruited by this group, though independent labour recruiters added more competition to the market. This chapter highlights the interactions between indigenous commerce and the expansion of the wage labour market starting in the 1890s. European employers were already dealing with headmen whom they had little authority over, but who provided them with recruits to conduct various activities in surface and underground mining starting in the 1880s.[541] Court records from Tarkwa District from the period of the second gold boom show that employers in the colonial mines continued to show a reluctant dependency on independent labour recruiters, who following the growing availability of capital due to cocoa farming increasingly also brought contract men to industry.

541 See, pp. 58-9.

5. 1. Indigenous Commerce and the Rise of Independent Labour Recruiters

The second gold boom in Wassa coincided with the rise of the cocoa farming which took off around the turn of the twentieth century, and capital from indigenous commerce was invested into the recruitment business for the mechanised mines. Cocoa sales, whether directly or not, translated into cash advances for contract men. In this way interflows of capital, not from 'modern' to 'traditional' commerce, but indeed in the opposite direction, furthered economic development in colonial Ghana.

Indigenous trade, like mechanised mining, benefitted greatly from infrastructural developments connected to colonial expansion, as well as the growing state of political stability in the colony and its protectorates. Huge sums of capital were accumulated in this sector over the next decade and beyond.[542] Cocoa went from contributing next to nothing to Gold Coast exports at the start of the 1890s to 81.59 per cent at the end of the 1920s.[543] Between 1901 and 1904 its export value lay at 13.17.[544] By comparison the export value of cocoa was £94,944 in 1902, whilst the value of gold exports was recorded at £96,880.[545] In 1901 however, the respective values were £42,837, and £22,187.[546]

Initial attempts to plant cocoa occurred in the 1880s and only negligible numbers of cocoa pods were exported in the 1890s. The article was introduced to the Akwapim Ridge in eastern and southern Ghana by the Basel missionaries and later by the Ghanaian Tetteh Quarshie. Indeed one administrator, in overlooking the efforts of the Swiss institution, declared that the cocoa industry 'was founded in 1879 by a native of Accra,

[542] Szereszewski, *Structural Changes in the Economy of Ghana, 1891–1911*, p. 9.
[543] G. Austin, 'Vent for Surplus or Productivity Breakthrough? The Take-off of Ghanaian Cocoa Exports, c. 1890-1936' *African Economic History Working Paper Series*, 8 (2012), 7.
[544] Ibid.
[545] PRAAD ADM 5/1/11, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1902, p. 22.
[546] Ibid.

who brought some cocoa plants and pods from Fernando Po, made a small plantation and, four years later, sold the cocoa pods in the neighbouring villages'.[547] Nevertheless, it would take just under another two decades for cocoa production to take off on a large-scale. In 1895 a first shipment of cocoa amounting to 121 lbs. was sent to England, and realized £6 1s.[548] Contributing to the volume of planting in the 1890s, was a wave of repatriates after the Anglo-Asante conflict. According to Austin, the returns 'began after the British imposed their rule in 1896, and continued after the failure of the revolt four years later, confirmed that the colonial order was stable for the foreseeable future.'[549] They, in addition to other conditional factors, incited an actual boom period after 1901.[550]

In 1901 a second shipment of cocoa harvested in Akwapim was sent, 'since when the industry, [—] fostered by the Government, which distributed large quantities of cocoa seeds from the Botanical Station at Aburi and, at one period, shipped crops to England for the native growers, and also by the Basel Mission Stations, [—] has advanced with rapid strides, fully 6,000,000 plants having been planted in one district alone'.[551] Most of the pods were transported from this interior district to Accra, from where they were shipped. The roads between Kumasi and other market towns of the interior were reportedly in 'excellent' condition starting in 1901 allowing for safer head porterage and improved rolling of casks filled with cocoa to the coast.

> The staple articles of export, viz., palm oil and palm kernels, to which now may be added cocoa, though subject to fluctuation, due to rise and fall of prices in Europe and good and bad seasons on the coast, are likely to continue to increase with the completion of the road system now under

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[547] Ibid., p. 23.
[548] Ibid.
[549] Austin, 'Vent for Surplus or Productivity Breakthrough?', p. 12.
[550] A larger availability of planting materials, and the 'demonstration effect' of the first adopters, also added to production growth. Ibid.
[551] PRAAD ADM 5/1/11, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1902, p. 23.

> construction, which is intended to tap the large palm-bearing areas and cocoa plantations in the eastern half of the Colony.[552]

The road system in the east was a meaningful improvement. Nevertheless, as with mechanised gold mining it was especially the construction of the Government Railway that really accelerated export rates, and enabled a cash crop revolution in Ghana.[553] As shown earlier, a further and significant rise in the value of cocoa exports was achieved between 1901 and 1902, from £42,837 to £94,944, and that year the overall value of exports from the colony increased by £214,453. This growth, according to administrative reports, 'was due partly to the gold mining, which had in previous years taken labour from other industries, beginning to be itself productive, partly to the rapid growth of the cocoa industry, and partly to the year having been a very good one for palm oil and palm kernels'.[554]

According to Polly Hill following this boost of prosperity, cocoa farmers were inclined to put their newly earned money to work in other ways than simply by putting it in a bank, due to issues of distrust of government and government agents.[555] They also wanted to stay off of the government's radar for reasons of taxation.[556]. Out of this mindset, they found independent ways of reinvesting their earnings or moving it for safekeeping. Their primary interest was in land purchases. Hill contended that the initial capital of these farmers was spent strictly within their own business arena. She observed that 'greater prosperity of the cocoa farmer consequent upon a higher cocoa price was

[552] Ibid., p. 61.
[553] For a discussion on the changes that the railway brought to the agricultural sector, see R. Jedwab and A. Moradi, 'Revolutionizing Transport: Modern Infrastructure, Agriculture and Development in Ghana', paper delivered to the Department of Economic History seminar, 8th March 2012, London School of Economics and Political Science. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/42263/.
[554] PRAAD ADM 5/1/11, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1902, p. 20.
[555] Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana*, p. 185.
[556] Ibid.

instantly reflected in increased purchases of land'.[557] With the passing of time however, their money was also commonly invested in other manners, as well. For example, they built homes to lease in urban and suburban spaces; they paid their children's school fees and related expenditures; and, in later years owning and operating a lorry was also a good option for making a decent return on one's investments.[558] In addition, many cocoa farmers chose to get involved in petty trading.[559] In fact, Hill put forward that trading and transport were 'the only common form of economic enterprise which sprang up directly from cocoa farming'.[560]

For individual migrant cocoa farmers petty trading presented a profitable, though precarious side business wherein they could make a good profit if business ran as planned. Unlike cocoa which 'takes a long time, fifteen years or more, to come into full bearing', by buying and reselling imported non-food items, these men could make a fast return.[561] Investing money in the recruitment business presented another possibility or cocoa farmers to put their savings to works. From petty trading there were no real barriers to getting involved in the recruitment business for colonial mines. Investing money in labour mobilisation promised a profit within a few months at the latest, though the human factor may have added other dangers. Nevertheless, if the right deal was struck with an employer the profit was instant. In addition, though there is not sufficient evidence to demonstrate that desertion was practiced by gangs for reasons of pure gain, it was an option that lay in the cards for independent gangs above all others, and it could be used to make a profit.

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557 Ibid., p. 180, 183.
558 Ibid., p. 190.
559 Ibid.
560 Ibid.
561 Ibid.

The story of Quow Hammah from 1894 reveals an instance of a petty trader gambling part of his earnings from trade in the recruitment business in Wassa. Quow Hammah described himself in the following manner: 'I live at Abosso and I am a petty trader and I am also a contractor for firewood for the Abosso Company'.[562] Men like Hammah who were connected to both the 'traditional' commerce also spotted opportunities in the 'modern' commercial market, though not as labourers themselves. Rather, Hammah used the savings he had accumulated by buying and selling goods to bring contract labourers to the gold mines in an extended manner. He recalled setting £24 aside, which was intended to serve as an advance payment for labourers on the coast.[563]

> 'On the Wednesday last I counted £24 [intended to be given] to a man Quamina Amman to take to the coast to advance labourers'.[564]

If we assume that Quamina Amman was expected to recruit twenty-five men, the usual size of a gang contracted to the mines by the Government Transport Department, the overall investment in each individual was around twenty shillings. However, considering that companies around this period were offering up to 30 shillings in advance payments per individual recruit, or roughly £37 10s for a gang of twenty-five, under ideal circumstances a trader could make a large and immediate profit once he managed to get the group hired, and even more profit could be made as time went by, as will be discussed below. Even if the recruits were later hired at the government rate, which is highly unlikely given the demand for labourers at the time, Quow Hammah would have at least received £12 10/- immediately, and with that almost half of his investment.

[562] PRAAD ADM 27/4/41, 'Quow Hammah v. Mahoma Nuhu', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 1894, pp. 39–42.
[563] Ibid.
[564] Ibid.

Naturally, a certain small percentage would also have gone to Amman for his services. The rest the trader would make back during and at the end of their contract.[565]

Nevertheless, there are additional questions regarding the extent of involvement of these traders in the wage labour market. Was Quamina Amman simply doing Hammah a favour, or was he the one who would later act as the leader of this gang when they were hired? Was Hammah, in that case, simply a supporter of this endeavour? As we will see with female labour recruiters later in this chapter, there did exist a class of recruiters who did nothing else but to bring labourers to areas where they were needed. In other words, they did not eventually move into the position of headwomen or headman. To what extent did this division exist for male recruiters? Unfortunately, these are not questions that can be answered with any certainty, using the available data. The court case that divulged the Quow Hammah story only shared a limited amount of information on this issue, as it concerned the entire sum of cash being stolen from his home.

5. 1. 1. Competition, Abuse, Poaching

European employers in the colonial context often had to rely on African intermediaries whom they knew to be conflicted between serving their professional appointments and satisfying personal ambitions in the accumulation of power, wealth, and honour.[566] Mine managers relied on independent contract men for the additional labourers they provided to the industry. At the same they suffered from the lack of control they had over this group. Moreover, in contrast to conditions on the Rand, mining companies in Wassa

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[565] The Muslim names of the recruiters may suggest a further distinction between career headmen and independent headmen, if the latter did not make the lengthy journey home in order to find recruits but went to the coast; perhaps a cost-saving measure.

[566] Lawrance, Osborn and Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks*, p. 4.

could not rely on the state to assist them in regulating independent labour recruiters until years later.[567] Unlike career headmen who depended on the authorisation and capital of mining companies to mobilize men, independent headmen used their own capital to recruit. They consequently sought to make the greatest profit possible out of this investment as their interests were generally not in career-building, and by doing so they added certain costs to the hiring process, not to mention an element of volatility and instability to the labour force. As already argued for the case of career headmen, labour recruiters were in a vulnerable position during the first stage of recruitment and vulnerability only shifted to the labourers over time. The potential reward was nevertheless considerable. Independent headmen who viewed such an engagement as a one-time, or irregular, venture would likely have been more scrupulous in their profit-making tactics.

One way in which they sought to maximize their profits was by playing companies against one another in order to secure a high advance payment for the members of his gang. Furthermore, another way they could make money was by exploiting the members of their own gang to some extent. Mine management may have preferred written contracts under the Master and Servant Ordinance of 1893, but prior to 1906 most contracts were made 'under hand', with headmen being in charge of the distribution of their men's wages. As was the case on the Rand, independent headmen 'preferred this system rather than that where the mine paid the workers directly because it

[567] This is discussed in Chapter 6, p. 209. Jeeves has argued that the ousting of independent African labour recruiters was a priority of mining entrepreneurs on the Rand; a goal achieved by organizing themselves under a central body and with the support of the state. Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy.*

enabled them to discount wages in various surreptitious ways'.[568] Headmen exhibited great creativity when it came to swindling their men and taking shares of the men's earnings in non-consensual ways, some even managing to successfully lengthen men's term of service by continuously deducting additional fees and fines (though such behaviour likely had limited application).[569] In 1904, for example, the headman John Fry who worked as a contractor for coal was exposed for lying to one of his men in order to retain the overwhelming share of the individual's overall earnings. The incident came to light after two of the labourers approached the mine's accountant U. Taylor with the information that Fry had claimed that their wages had been stolen by another one of his recruits. The first labourer expressed his disbelief over the fact his wages had fallen from £15 1s 9d to £7, and he explained Fry's involvement in the cut: 'The white man say when we complete work, he give £15 1[s] 9[d]. We finish. On payday accused come with £15 and say he give £5 to make house. Accused handed £7 to me. He told me whiteman only give me £7. I went and asked. [The employer] say he give full [sic]'. Several other labourers confirmed the story, as well. As they struggled to exude even a jolt of power in demanding their full wages, the headman stuck to his story. The truth was only revealed once the General Manager's threatened to get personally involved in the matter. Most likely because Fry was a career headmen who anticipated future job prospects with the company, he confessed and offered to produce the money, provided the manager '[went] no further with [the] matter'. This was the '[third] time [Fry] tried to swindle the boys'.

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568 Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy'*, p. 97.
569 PRAAD ADM 27/4/48, Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 1909, pp. 762–3.

He Fry been an independent headmen, this story may not have had a happy ending.[570] Once again, all headmen were likely to engage in these types of activities, though with independent headmen it was more expected.

There was addition space for abuse by headmen in their magisterial roles. The physical and organizational disconnect between general management and regular labourers becomes palpable in court cases dealing with disputes between headmen and labourers. Therefore, European employers depended on the authority of a headman over the members of his gang and were generally reluctant to get involved in these types of conflicts. Management's lack of interest in getting involved in 'minor' disputes however, only fuelled these kinds of injustices. Given the nature of the regulatory system, European employers tended to side with the headmen.[571] A headman could easily push the boundary of his authority. This was even more true for independent headmen.

[570] In 1904, for example, the headman John Fry who worked as a contractor for coal was exposed for lying to one of his men in order to retain the overwhelming share of the individual's overall earnings. The incident came to light after two of the labourers approached the mine's accountant U. Taylor with the information that Fry had claimed that their wages had been stolen by another one of his recruits. The first labour expressed his disbelief over the fact his wages had fallen from £15 1s 9d to £7, and he explained Fry's involvement in the cut: 'The white man say when we complete work, he give £15 1[s] 9[d]. We finish. On payday accused come with £15 and say he give £5 to make house. Accused handed £7 to me. He told me whiteman only give me £7. I went and asked. [The employer] say he give full [sic]'. Several other labourers confirmed the story, as well. As they struggled to exude even a jolt of power in demanding their full wages, the headman stuck to his story. The truth was only revealed once the general manager's threatened to get personally involved in the matter. Most likely because Fry was a career headmen who anticipated future job prospects with the company, he confessed and offered to produce the money, provided the manager '[went] no further with [the] matter'. This was the '[third] time [Fry] tried to swindle the boys'. He Fry been an independent headmen, this story may not have had a happy ending. PRAAD ADM 27/4/43, 'Rex v. J. Fry', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 12 May 1904, pp. 329–30.

[571] Employers in the mines generally only took a stance in conflicts between headmen and the members of their gangs where their own fairness was directly put to question, or when the headman had clearly overstepped his powers. For example, when the government contract labourer Shandi was caught quarrelling with another labourer by the name of Jusu over 'playing cards' at 10 in the morning, his headman immediately threatened to fine him. 'The headman said they must catch of we and fine we 10/- each and I say I get no money then the headman say they must [tie] me and the [tied] me about one hour they put me under the sun. One woman come and [rowed] with them before they left me [sic]'. Shandi refused to pay and took his concern to Migeod since the headman claimed to have gotten such orders from him. CUL RCMS 139/16, 'Shandi to Chief Officer of the Transport Department'.

The poaching of labourers already in the employment of a mining company was a crime primarily attributed to independent headmen, though it cannot be said for sure that career headmen were not also involved in this type of activity. Independent labour recruiters, perhaps in trying to forgo search costs for labour, did not shy away from luring away contract men to new wage jobs. This tactic may have been acceptable for the recruitment of casual labourers. However, secret talks had to be held to persuade the highly favoured 'agreement boys'.[572] The ensuing conversation, out of earshot of potential informers to local management, mirrored parts of the negotiation process that would have occurred in the home village such as the covering of debts, future wages, transportation costs, and the supply of advances.[573] For example, during the hearing of one allegedly illicit recruiter, the 'underground boy' Albert Kofi testified about the recruiter Bonsa Kwamin who had tried to recruit him one week before.

> [He] came to me and asked me if I worked. I told him yes. He said he wanted people to work on timber with him and that [we] would get plenty of money to pay our debts. Seven of us went with him. He advanced us each £1. We gave him accused a paper for the advance. His clerk told us we would not get a full advance from accused. He refused to pay our train here. We asked him to pay what the mine at Tarquah owed us when we left at his request. We complained to the F.M. at Abosso and he sent us all to the police. Accused spoke to me first at Tarquah and said if I left the mine we would get plenty of money on timberwork.
> [Speaking directly to Kwamin] We asked you for money at Abosso. £6 was the sum. You would not pay my debt to Adai.[574]

Money was not the only incentive with which recruiters could tempt workers. Another popular negotiation point was the array of lifestyle choices available at a competing mine. Potential recruits were informed of a livelier social scene and more familiar types of

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[572] For such an operation to be successful it was occasionally necessary to work from within the company's own structure, with headmen offering small sums of money to local mineworkers who could convince others to desert. For example, a policeman formerly employed by the Abbontiakoon Mine, later returned to the mining site to induce contract workers to desert and instead take up work on the Sekondi road. He offered a local mineworker the sum of 2/-, more than a day's wages at the time, for each man he could convince to leave. PRAAD ADM 27/4/54, 'Inspector General of Police v. Mana Wangara', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 1914, pp. 246–52.
[573] PRAAD ADM 27/4/61, 'Inspector General of Police v. Bonsa Kwamin', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, March 1919–July 1920, pp. 223, 225.
[574] Ibid.

food, or 'chop' as it is locally called, that they were missing out on.[575] Occasionally, it could also pay for the headman to get his entire gang to abscond. If the headman could be convinced to switch with his gang there would be little room for the manager, who relied on him for order and the surveillance of other men, to retaliate. Where this opportunity best presented itself was after a gang had arrived in the mining centre but before it had reached its assigned place of work. Isaka Dagarti, a labour recruiter for the Tarkwa Mine recalled being approached by another African recruiter at Huni Valley in Tarkwa district as he walked from Osei back to the mine with a freshly recruited gang of thirty men whom he had contracted for six months by verbal agreement.[576]

> He said I must give him my men to work. […] There is no food at [Tarquah] Mine. [He] abused me. I said — I brought those people — you can't get [them].[577]

The offensive labour recruiter was however, relentless in his approach, ignoring Dagarti and haggling with his recruits directly.[578] When Dagarti woke up the next morning, all thirty men had left to serve the Offin Rubber Company in Dunkwa.[579] Even worse for Dagarti, his verbal agreements left him had no legal recourse. For a headman, the failure to deliver workers could translate into a loss of time, money, and possibly one's professional reputation when it came time for future recruitment engagements. This may explain the desperate acts of some headmen. In a more blatant incident, Seiden Wangara a labour recruiter from the Northern Territories took the even riskier step of poaching several contracted gangs directly from their place of work. Under the pretence of visiting the Dagwin mine in Axim District to collect a debt, he approached a number of other

[575] See, for example, PRAAD ADM 27/4/60, 'Inspector General of Police v. Seiden Wangara', pp. 276–277.
[576] PRAAD ADM 27/4/57, 'Mine Supplier Taquah Mine v. Rodson', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 1915, pp. 46–7.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Ibid.
[579] Ibid.

headmen over several days, telling them 'there was [work in] firewood at the place from which he came'.[580] One of those headmen at Dagwin, Dogi Wangara, reported his conversation with Seiden to the manager:

> He said he wanted to find boys [and] told me to persuade my boys to go away. I said that they were all contract boys [and] if he wanted boys he should go to Coomassie.[581]

Wangara was issued with a £5 fine.[582] There is no indication that any of the recruiters accused of poaching labourers had professional ties to mining companies. Though they could not refuse the labourers that independent labour recruiters provided, the ability of mine management to regulate the actions of the men was severely limited.

5. 1. 2. Indigenous Supporters of Independent Recruitment?: The Role of Female Labour Recruiters

As mentioned earlier, based on the case of Quow Hammah there is still some ambiguity regarding whether there was a distinction between financiers of independent recruitment and the individuals who actually became headmen. In other words, was Quow Hammah simply supporting this activity with his own finances? Or, did he actually enter the labour force becoming the headman of the gang himself? There is not enough evidence to come to any general conclusions on this issue. At the same time a look at the participation of female labour recruiters in the expansion of the wage labour market sheds some light on this subject by illustrating that distinctions could exist between the individual who funded and conducted recruitment, and the person who later acted as headmen to the gang of labourers in the mines.

[580] PRAAD ADM 27/4/60, 'Inspector General of Police v. Seiden Wangara', pp. 276–277.
[581] Ibid.
[582] Ibid.

The Hausa woman Madam Mariam was a prolific supplier of labourers of all kinds to the Government Transport Department. The gangs she recruited were at first solely provided to government services, but later she was commended for bringing wage earners to the mechanised mines. She initially appears in the sources in 1900 when she recruited carriers at Cape Coast for the Ashanti Expedition, the final war between the British Imperial Government and the Asante kingdom.[583] Mariam, noted Migeod of the Government Transport Department, 'collected a very large number during the present war'.[584] She then later became a supplier of contract labourers between 1903 and 1919.[585] For instance, in 1903 Migeod wrote the following message to an assistant transport officer indicating that she regularly collaborated with this department long after the end of the war.

> Please endeavor in some way to get in touch with Lagos men and also Bassa men and Kroomen at Sekondi for supply to the mines. Perhaps that Hausa woman Mariam would be useful in connection with the former.[586]

Given that the Government Transport Department configured the membership of its own gangs internally, after the labourers had been individually registered, her involvement was limited to getting the men to the Transport Department.

Yet, the presence of female headmen working in the mechanised mines should not necessarily be discounted altogether. There are several sources indicating a presence of female labourers on these properties even during the second gold boom. The conventional narrative tells us that the tasks traditionally undertaken by women during the nineteenth century, such as panning gold or collecting firewood, were gradually

[583] CUL RCMS 139/11/37.
[584] Ibid.
[585] 'Farewell Circular to the Staff of the Gold Coast Transport Department on its Abolition', 23 June 1919, RCMS 139/11/37.
[586] CUL RCMS 139/6, 'Assistant Transport Officer to Chief Officer of the Transport Department'.

becoming redundant due to improved machinery. However, the occupations of women also seemed to be evolving with the introduction of advanced machinery. Even during this period of technological intensification women were still present as labourers on these concessions, as affirmed when the Guggisbergs visited the Abbontiakoon Mines around 1902. They made the following observation of women working in supplement of the new crushing machines:

> The glare of the tropical sunlight dazzled me as we emerged into the open at the shaft-mouth. Here we found a big heap of lumps of ore –which, as I have already described, is a hard mixture of rock and gold-varying from the size of a thimble to that of four or five human fists put together. Two natives were very busy shovelling these lumps thickly on to a continuous belt of stiff leather about a foot broad, which was running slowly on pulley-rollers to the crushing-house about fifty yards away, where it made a turn around a revolving wheel and returned direct to the shaft-mouth. Along this travelling-belt, as it is called, were stationed about a dozen women and boys, busily employed in picking some of the lumps off the belt and throwing them away after a cursory glance. These were the pieces which experience had taught them contained no gold, but were merely stones and therefore unworthy of any attention from the scientific machinery through which the remainder of, the lumps on the belt were now to pass. It was most interesting to see the unerring accuracy with which the black hands shot out, seized the offenders, and cast them on one side. Very seldom, the manager assured me, did an unworthy lump pass through his stamps'.[587]

Contrary to the finding of Dumett, surface labourers continued to outnumber underground miners, and official records also confirm the continuation of a female presence in the labour force of the colonial mines. According to census data, in 1898 221 women were working in the mining industry, but by 1903 the number had dropped to 7, however by 1904 not a single woman was recorded as working for a gold mining company.[588] During this same period the male population of surface labourers rose from 1,811 in 1898, to 4,046 in 1903, to 10,941 in 1904.[589] Women apparently never engaged in underground mining.[590]

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[587] Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, i, p. 138.
[588] See Appendix 3. 3. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, p. 269
[589] *Parliamentary Papers 1906*, [Cd. 2734, 2745, 2911], p. 599: Mines and Quarries: General Report and Statistics for 1904.
[590] The number of male workers went from 681 underground labourers in 1898, to 2,726 men in 1903, to 6,103 in 1904. Ibid.

Overall, however, the numbers confirm a gradual marginalisation of women from the modern industrial workplace.[591] What one is not able to decipher nonetheless, is whether women worked in a steady and extended manner, and if so whether they organised themselves in the same way that men did, though there are however, many accounts of headwomen in other sectors, i.e. porterage and agriculture.[592] Thus, for now the evidence is limited to the story of Madam Mariam, who was a particularly enterprising individual, having no qualms migrating for her work. She eventually ended up in Kumasi, where she established a station from which to recruit labourers for various types of wage work connected to the construction of various ports and railways, which demanded an equally high number of unskilled contract labourers around this time. In this manner she surely secured her a great deal of wealth.[593] At the same time it is important to keep in mind that it was not only individual African entrepreneurs who were excited about the potential riches of the recruitment business. Company records also document independent European recruiters serving the mechanised mines in Wassa during the 'jungle' boom.

5. 1. 3 Independent European Labour Recruiters in Wassa

Although the trend did not continue strongly, there was also an emergence of European labour recruiters in colonial Ghana, which can be used as further evidence of how lucrative the business actually was. The story of a Mr. L. Eamonson who in 1902

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[591] I. Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London, 1987), pp. 119–33.

[592] In addition, women without a doubt played an active role in the mobilisation of hired labourers in agricultural production during this period. B. Grier, 'Pawns, Porters, and Petty Traders: Women in the Transition to Cash Crop Agriculture in Colonial Ghana', *Signs*, 17 (1992), pp. 317–8.

[593] CUL RCMS 139/6, 'Assistant Transport Officer to Chief Officer of the Transport Department'.

provided contract labourers for a variety of wage jobs in the mines, but also as carriers, is one case in point. Eamonson originally arrived in colonial Ghana as an employee of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation in Obuasi.[594] However, he soon ended his contract with the company properly and voluntarily, to get involved in the 'transport business' together with Mr. G. C. Moor.[595]

> [L. Eamonson] Left this Corporation's employ on the 18th June 1902, and is now on his way to the Coast via the Offin River to join Mr. G. C. Moor, late Chemist at Obuassi, who I believe is expected to take up this Corporation's transport business.
>
> Mr. Eamonson's arrangements for leaving this Corporation's service before the expiration of his agreement was sanctioned, I understand, during my recent absence at Cape Coast in March last. But I believe Messrs Daw and Webster can supply you with the necessary information, as the latter gentleman was at that tine acting as General Superintendent at Obuassi'.[596]

As he had enough credit in his name at this point to cover all of his debts, the manager reported, 'Eamonson 'gave notice to leave our employ two months ago and has paid his own travelling expenses'.[597] However, once it became evident that Mr. Moor would not be returning to West Africa, Eamonson decided to experiment with a venture on his own. He initially managed to employ a gang of men, whom he later supplied to the Ashanti Mines for surface mining on contract, that is as gatherers of firewood.[598] He also made deals with the Cote d' Or concession.

> He is working at Cote d' Or, and the old disused Miners' quarters at Cote d' Or he has pulled down, and he is re-erecting a similar building for his own use. His men, as soon as they have acquired sufficient ground, will build their huts on the spot where they are working, so as not to interfere if possible with out own natives.[599]

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[594] LMA MS14171, vol. 1, s. 117: 'Eamonson', 23 August 1902.
[595] Ibid.
[596] LMA MS14171, vol. 1, D. 367: 'N. J. Suckling to the Secretary of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation'.
[597] LMA MS14171, vol. 1, s. 65: 'N. J. Suckling to the Secretary of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation', 21 June 1902.
[598] Ibid.
[599] LMA MS14171, vol. 1, D. 393: 'Mr. Eamonson'.

Managers at the Ashanti Mines were quite enthusiastic about this experiment. They perhaps anticipated having a better bargaining position with a growing presence of European contractors.

> If Mr. Eamonson is able to supply us with fuel at the same rates as we were paying hitherto it will save Mr. James a good deal of worry and labour; and now Mr. Cox has returned and has resumed his old position of bringing in logs to the saw mill etc., has enabled Mr. James to pay more attention to the buildings and other surface operations.[600]

Eamonson himself must have expected great prosperity from this recruitment venture, since according to reports from the managers at the Ashanti Mines, right after he had secured the deal with the firm, Eamonson adjusted his lifestyle in a big way. In anticipation of future revenue he began to build a 'large house' and to spend 'extravagantly'.[601] Nevertheless, there were growing tensions between Eamonson, mine management, and the African contract labourers. Problems started with the latter demanding a monthly payment, the same as other contract men on this property. Furthermore, mine management agreed to their terms, regarding it as only fair.

> We did all we could to help him [Eamonson], and as the boys objected to have their money withheld for 6 months (as he arranged on the Coast). I agreed to pay them monthly, the same as our other natives.[602]

Nevertheless, Eamonson did not take the interference of the managers lightly. Did a monthly payment diminish his returns or the likelihood of the labourers staying till the end of their contracts? Or, did Mr. Eamonson simply not appreciate his middleman position being overstepped? Either way the actions of mine management sent him into revolt. It was later shared with the Secretary of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation that, 'Mr. Eamonson has cancelled his contract and has left Obuasi, and the opinion formed by

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[600] Ibid.
[601] LMA MS14171, vol. 1, s. 117: 'N. J. Suckling to the Secretary of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation', 23 August 1902.
[602] Ibid.

Mr. Daw in regard to him has been fully confirmed. He is most shiftless and unreliable, and proved an entire failure as a contractor'.[603]

> I thought that by doing this any cause of discontent might be removed, but evidently our efforts were not appreciated by Mr. Eamonson, and he informed us that he could secure very good contracts on the Railway, so I presume he is going to make an attempts in that direction. I however, think that had he continued with the Corporation in supplying them with firewood, he would have come out all right.[604]

Eamonson ran away leaving behind huge debts at the Ashanti Mines, but also at other businesses:

> Before he had time to recoup himself he had other schemes on hand. […] I may add that he owes the African Association, Cape Coast, £30-9-3, and […] he is also considerably indebted to this Corporation, viz. £118-4-8.[605]

This particular European labour recruiter had not given up on getting wealthy from the recruitment business easily. However, the sources do not show a general proliferation of private recruitment businesses run by European as on the Rand.[606] Rather, African labour recruiters continued to dominate the field.

5. 1. 4. Child Labour and Headship

There is no evidence of mine managers employing child labourers through headmen. Nonetheless, court records from Tarkwa do reveal that individuals self-identified as headmen also hired out children for domestic wage work in the mines. For instance, in 1908 in the town of Kotochere in Tarkwa district, the young boy Yaw Henry recalled his headman, handing him over to his current 'master' in whose service he had been for the

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[603] Ibid.
[604] Ibid.
[605] Ibid.
[606] Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy.*

last two and a half years.[607] The headman was depicted as a guardian of sorts. Yaw Henry described him as his 'brother', but also as a 'countryman', indicating that this was not likely a family member, but rather an individual from his home region. Yaw Henry's headman who was residing in distant Axim on the coast during this period, had been the recipient of Yaw's wages since the beginning of this engagement.[608] From Yaw Henry's perspective, the 'contract' had been made out for an indefinite period. The long-term hiring out of child labourers to employers, exhibits a more coercive potential of the headship system when unregulated and dealing with youths. In this particular case, the relationship between the child and his employers appear to have been mostly amicable, the boy stating: 'My master, he good man'.[609] Nevertheless, there is no question that apart for running away he had no control over whom he would be selling his labour power. It is probable, but not certain, that this type of labour exchange would have drawn more attention in the mechanised mining industry than in the agricultural market. Still, it cannot be said conclusively that child labour was not existent under the headship system in the colonial mines, until further evidence emerges.

Although the evidence provided by these few cases of independent indirect recruitment in Wassa can only go so far in extending our understanding of 'industrial' labour recruitment in colonial West Africa, they also provide priceless information about the flow of capital, from the 'traditional' to 'modern' commercial sector, and with that the underlying forces of economic development during the colonial period. It also contradicts a rhetoric that has cast indigenous traders as the spoilers of economic 'progress', whilst at

[607] PRAAD ADM 27/4/47, 'Rex pro Superintendant S. v. Peter Ross', Criminal and Civil Record Book, District Commissioner's Court, 12 March 1908, pp. 72–3.
[608] Ibid.
[609] Ibid.

the same time fetishising wage labour. The final chapter of this thesis tries to expand the study of non-wage labour by putting headship and political labour side by side, and arguing that both forms of organising labour need to be considered in a more differentiated manner than they have been in the past.

PART III —

POLITICAL LABOUR

CHAPTER 6. Indirect Recruitment and the Legacy of Slavery under Colonial Rule

Until now this thesis has dealt with headship; what we might think of as a system of voluntary debt bondage. It has explained the expansion of the wage labour market connected to the Wassa gold mines from the 1870s as occurring predominantly through diverse practices of indirect recruitment by African headmen. We have further analysed the varying degrees to which these indigenous clientage relationships were incorporated into the mining hierarchy, and thus under the control of foreign employers. We may now take a comparative look at headship and another form of intermediary labour, namely political labour; indirect recruitment through African chiefs, which was organised by administrative officials. In what way did the centralisation of indirect recruitment and collaboration with new African intermediaries transform labour relations in the mining industry? What were its mechanisms, its implications, and its effects? While from the perspective of foreign employers certain labour market ideals were finally met, as labourers were abundantly available in certain pockets of the Northern Territories, and they could be hired at lower wage rates, in the long term political labour proved to be an untenable system, which depended too heavily on labourers' social incentives and not enough on economic motivations.

There are a number of preconceptions about colonial 'forced labour' in the historiography of labour history in West Africa. There are also considerable difficulties in ascertaining exactly what forced labour looked like in various colonial contexts at different times. Part of the reason for this difficulty is that the term is often used as a shortcut to highlight restrictions on the individual liberties of African workers during the colonial period. However, both headship and political labour are often, and somewhat misleadingly, lumped together, though they comprised different manners and perhaps degrees of exploitation. This makes it even more necessary to demarcate similarities and differences between the two systems. This chapter focuses on some of the identifiable social and economic ramifications of the political labour system as it was established in the Northern Territories between 1906 and 1909, and uses the findings to balance some of the received wisdom in this field. It leans largely on the same sources used in the study by Roger Thomas, but it serves to expand the discussion of 'colonial forced labour' and its contrasts to slavery.[610]

The Emergence of the Northern Territories as a Labour Reserve

> [I]t must be remembered that, when the labour supplies of the colony are exhausted, the Northern Territory is the one place in the Gold Coast where large numbers of labourers could be obtained.
>
> — Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1906[611]

The influx of capital into gold mines in Wassa reached a low in 1905, leading many mining companies to cease production, and leaving just a few more established and technically better equipped ventures to prove that the industry could pay its way. At the same time, having fewer competing mines did not alter the conditions of recruitment in a lasting manner. Instead, the surplus of labour resulting from the cessation of the smaller companies was quickly neutralised as labourers selected jobs in other sectors, and just months later the gold mines found themselves on the verge of another severe labour

[610] Thomas, 'Forced Labour in British West Africa: The Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906–1927', *The Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), 79–103.
[611] PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1906, s. 5; RHO MS 7ss. 14 s.14.

shortage. That same year, F. Cogill, the Secretary for Mines, reported that, as anticipated, 'there has been a shortage of labour, which, although not sufficient to stop the mines working, had the effect of forcing some companies to pay higher rates of wages than those adopted by the Mine Managers' Association'. The mines were already offering daily wage rates greater than 1s 6d for underground miners and more than 1s 3d for surface miners.[612] The discovery of spots in the savanna region in the north where labourers were abundant brought employers in the mining sector considerable relief and improved their bargaining position in an unprecedented manner.

The sudden rise in prominence of the Northern Territories as a major recruiting source was not a matter of missed or overseen opportunities; rather it was the by-product of political transition. Following the War of the Golden Stool in 1900, which forced the *Asantehene* (King of the Asante) into exile, a protectorate was declared over the Northern Territories, and the region was opened up to colonial expansion.[613] However, colonisation was negotiated differently here, as compared to other parts of colonial Ghana. Disadvantageous economic conditions made any public investments into local agricultural production unlikely, maybe even unwise.[614] However, to their surprise, newly-appointed commissioners to the area encountered certain pockets in the northeast and northwest inhabited with purportedly idle young men, who not long before had

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612 PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1906, s. 5. Appendix 3. 5.
613 Mcphee, *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa*, pp. 23, 55.
614 While one colonial official blamed the slow pace of development on 'the low intelligence of the vast majority of the inhabitants, the ravages inflicted a few years back by the great chiefs Samory and Barbatu, the poorness of the soil, as compared with the economic wealth of the forest belt, and the deficiency of water in many parts', there was little official effort to turn such conditions around. PRAAD ADM 5/1/16, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1907, p. 21. Hilson, Amankwah and Ofori-Sarpong have contended that this decision initiated Ghana's current 'North–South poverty divide'. 'Going for Gold: Transitional Livelihoods in Northern Ghana', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (51), pp. 118-9.

served as local warriors during the period of political turmoil.[615] The men were found to be living in an 'enormously thickly populated district'.[616] Therefore, an administrator explained, 'the opportunity has been taken to impress upon the chiefs the advantage of sending the young men to work in the mines and the colony'.[617] These young men became a primary export of the protectorate through a 'labour crusade' that started after 1906, and was described as forced labour in the historiography.[618]

'Forced labour', nonetheless, in the context of this particular thesis requires some qualification. Political labour can be distinguished from some of the colonial government's darker, more forceful practices of engaging labourers during this period on a number of grounds. Colonial forced labour in and of itself was a regular solution to the conflict stemming from the desire of the colonial administration and certain members of the Colonial Office to improve the transport and building infrastructure in the colonies, and the reluctance on the part of the government in the metropole to condone large public investment in colonial projects over an extensive period of time, though the interests of lobbying groups for private industry could also impact colonial policy on labour relations.[619] Nevertheless, the extent of compulsion involved varied over time and space.

Periods of conquest and 'development' tended to trigger particularly brutal practices of recruitment on the part of the colonial state. To illustrate this point, a particularly repressive act of colonial 'enlistment' was captured in the company records of the Ashanti Mines from 1897, wherein a manager described government raids for

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[615] Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana*, p. 139.
[616] PRO CO 98/16, Annual Report on the Northern Territories for the Year 1906, s. 9.
[617] PRO CO 98/16, Annual Report on the Northern Territories for the Year 1906, s. 9.
[618] Thomas, 'Forced Labour in British West Africa'.
[619] A. Keese, 'Searching for the Reluctant Hands: Obsession, Ambivalence and the Practice of Organising Involuntary Labour in Colonial Cuanza-Sul and Malange Districts, Angola, 1926–1945', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41 (2013), 238-58.

labourers at a local marketplace. Supposedly, even labourers who were already in the employment of foreign employers were forced to become government carriers.

> In the early days of [December] we found carriers coming in freely. Some workers also came in freely – volunteers at about 150 a day, but the [government] wanting 50 […] raided the marketplace and caught men lawfully employed by Europeans and others fresh from the interior with produce and compelling them to leave their work and their treasured loads pressed them by force into their service as carriers.[620]

The momentary appetite for colonial expansion into the Northern Territories likely explains the brutality of this incident.

That being said, recruitment in the Northern Territories for the gold mines after 1905 unfolded differently. There were no labour raids to remind observers of times past. Instead, officials used a conniving and indirect strategy of persuasion to cajole young men into entering the wage labour market for little money, and under work conditions that were often very poor. With the help of local chiefs, administrative officials promised these men an educational experience from which they would also reap large economic benefits. All the while they would do their best to make sure that any financial gain made by the recruits would be at best minimal and that access to the outside world and new experiences would be limited. The officials took advantage of the fact that almost all of these men were inexperienced with work and life in the south to assign them the most arduous jobs in the mines; to present them with unprecedented low wages to follow such occupations; to restrict their movement and interactions with other social groups on the concessions; and administrators developed a staggered payment system which obligated labourers to return home after their stint in the mines.

The Chief Commissioner of the protectorate, A. E. G. Watherston, played a leading role in negotiations with local chiefs, who were believed to have a hold over

[620] E. Cade, 'Letters to London', November 1897–August 1898, p. 9.

potential recruits. His strategy for getting men to the south almost immediately infringed upon the activities of African headmen, who until this point had been the ones travelling to rural areas in order to recruit men. Watherson designed a model speech in a circular that was issued to all officers to be delivered to the chiefs. The speech touched on the educational value of work, and encouraged young men to become the driving economic force of this region through wage jobs. During the recruitment campaigns administrators made wild promises to local authorities regarding the wealth that their young men would bring back with them in order to reinvest in their home regions. For instance, it was put on official record and certainly also told to chiefs that recruits 'bringing back their savings will introduce much needed money into the country'.[621] Ideally, a good part of this sum would go towards cattle herding, and some would be directly acquired by the chieftaincy in the form of taxes.

In a follow-up on the speeches, 'labour representatives' from the districts of Wa in the northwest, and Navrongo in the northeast, were selected to tour the mechanised mines in Wassa in December 1906. The Secretary for Mines gave a highly optimistic account of their visit:

> With a view to finding a new source of labour, early in December last, some 30 Labour Representatives were brought down from the Northern Territories by the Government, so that they might see for themselves the different kinds of work and the conditions of living in the mining districts.
>
> The labour representatives were picked from races inhabiting a large portion of the Northern Territories, and were carefully chosen so as to properly represent the districts from which they came.
>
> The visit was a decided success, the people showing an interest in all that they saw.
>
> On their departure they stated that, on their return to their country, they would inform people of what they had seen, and they anticipated that their countrymen would start to come down to work in the mines.[622]

[621] PRO CO 98/16, Annual Report on the Northern Territories for the Year 1906, s. 9.
[622] PRO CO 98/16, Report on the Gold Mining Industry for the Year 1906, s. 5.

Cogill showed them different properties in Tarkwa, the Sekondi port, and other novelties to impress them and the 'representatives' seemed to be contented with what they saw. In the following years they assisted political officials in the mobilisation of thousands of men from the Northern Territories to work on the Wassa gold fields. Under the supervision of a District Commissioner, the initial contingent of labourers, comprising a variety of social groups, arrived to work in southwest Ghana in 1906. The very first group of 17 Isalla and 9 Dagarti departed for the Abbontiakoon Mines where Gerhard Stockfeld, president of the Mine Managers' Association, was in charge.[623] Most of these men were assigned to underground mining where the gold mines were in greatest need of contract labourers.

The experiment was almost immediately judged as rewarding. According to political officials in the north, many of these young men 'had never left their villages before, and the results have already been successful, — one gang very shortly after their return proceeding to the Abbontiakoon Mines, and many others were ready to follow […].[624] In the upcoming years, too, mine management's requests for labourers were swiftly answered.[625] When, in the first decade of the twentieth century, mining entrepreneurs referred to the Northern Territories as the 'best-governed portion of West Africa', they were basically heralding the triumph of the new centralised labour recruitment system, which was borne out of the spread of British influence into social and economic affairs of the region.[626]

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[623] Thomas, 'Forced Labour in British West Africa', p. 81.
[624] PRO CO 98/16, Annual Report on the Northern Territories for the Year 1906, s. 9.
[625] Due to the construction of the railway between Tarkwa to Prestea and Accra to Kumase in 1908, the mines suffered another major labour shortage.
[626] Bowler, *Gold Coast Palaver*, p. 84.

6. 1. The Preservation of Tribal Authority or 'Industrial' Control?

In 1909 the British miner J. H. Curle, who worked both on the Rand and Wassa gold fields, insisted 'that the relation between the government and the mining companies on the whole question of native labour are now harmonious'.[627] British officials had gained such a stronghold on the populations of the Northern Territories that their requests for labourers were met with hardly any overt conflict. For mining companies the spread of British influence meant that they could, indeed had to, go directly through political officials in order to make direct requests for groups of labourers. This obligation was, of course, not much of a burden given the numerous ways in which the managers in turn enjoyed and profited from colonial intervention, which was at once geared towards upholding 'tribal' authority and towards economic expansion.

After 1906 managers in the gold mines were finally able to sidestep their dealings with hundreds of often competing headmen and search costs were consequently declining. They could also now siphon a huge group of labourers at once and through a single African intermediary, as indicated in the above quotation. Competition may not have been completely eliminated given the colonial state's own needs, but at least the mines only had one other employer to take into consideration when contemplating how many men they required. Moreover, the trust in the system imbued in many of the men from this area was particularly attractive to employers who were desperate to cut costs and gain increased control over the labour force. Yet political labour was not slavery, therefore African agency in this system requires highlighting.

[627] Curle explained: 'Labour locally is not abundant. This before long would become a serious problem, but for the fact that in the hinterland of the colony is a large supply that can be drawn upon. The natives of the hinterland can be secured only by permission of the Government, but this has been given'. 'West African Mines', 44.

The proximity of the new source of labour to the Wassa region further allowed mine managers to cut labour expenditures alone in terms of the amount of money that was constantly being spent on transporting labourers from afar. However, where the financial benefits for employers in mines were even more concretised was in the low wage rates offered to the new recruits. These young men were not only assigned to dangerous and generally undesirable underground work, but this period also saw a substantial fall in daily wage rates. Whilst in 1903 the Abbontiakoon Mines paid this group 1s 6d in addition to 3d on a daily basis, and underground miners were also generally paid 1s 6d each day in 1904,[628] the daily earnings of a labourer from the North for the same work was one shilling at the start of the 'labour crusade'. They evidently had little knowledge about how much their labour was actually worth in wages, perhaps also related to the fact that they lacked the proper representatives to guide and bargain for them.

The strategy for drastically lowering the wage rates was not so much based on oppression as it was on the intentional and self-serving dishonesty on the part of officials and employers involved. Coercion was present in the pressure the chiefs put on the young men to migrate, but were the chiefs themselves tricked or coerced? Thomas has posited that local authorities hoped to gain political favour with the British by fulfilling what they perceived as orders for labourers, though in effect responding to calls for labour was the only way in which the chiefs were able to show their loyalty and to contribute to the

[628] The wage rate of labourers from the north who were working for government services were even more appalling. For example, starting in 1907 the district office began to recruit locally. One administrator recalling the evolution of this partnership noted that workers were originally provided for free for a year, then for 1/- per week, then 3d per day. By 1915 6d per day was the going rate for unskilled labourers in Tamale, Salaga, and Yeji. PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, No. 155/7/1914; PRAAD ADM 5/1/23, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1915, p. 28; Appendix 3. 4. and 3. 5.

development of colonial Ghana.[629] African chiefs also received monetary compensation for the men they provided. Yet, economic incentives were meagre for them, too. As mentioned earlier, the chiefs were promised that their men would return with wealth to be reinvested in the local economy. In addition, they were provided with straightforward compensation per individual recruit, which comprised five shillings.[630] The money was conceived as a means of securing the compliance of the chiefs and of getting them to convince their men to agree to temporary wage work. Watherson reckoned that this amount was convincing enough as an inducement for them to 'use their influence to persuade the young men to go down'.[631] It was also meant to compensate them for losses in labour over these several months. The Chief Commissioner insisted that an offer of five shillings 'makes them take more interest in the recruiting of these labourers, and compensates them for the loss of their share of the crops of the absentees as naturally less local ground in places under cultivation'.[632] There was also the possibility for chiefs to make additional money if their men actually stayed with the mine over an extended period of time. For example, the Chief Commissioner of Tamale reported to the Colonial Secretary that 'At present Mr. Bottom of the Tarkwa Mine has agreed to pay 2s 6d on all who arrive and remain three months and another 2s 6d on all who remain six months'.[633] Similar to the compensation given to the labourers, the capitation fee given to the chiefs was highly undervalued and almost symbolic. Indeed, a political official in the north acknowledged that it 'was only through the loyalty and good will of the chiefs that we got

[629] Thomas, 'Forced Labour in British West Africa', 86, 80.
[630] The five shillings were unified across the various districts in the northeast and northwest where officials pursued labourers and there is no evidence of any chiefs attempted to request a higher sum. This meager amount may indicate that financial profit was not a primary motivating factor for the chiefs.
[631] Ibid., p. 81.
[632] Ibid., p. 86n.
[633] 'Chief Commissioner Tamale to Colonial Secretary', No. 513/119/1905, 2 December 1909.

labour for so cheap, and not because it was economic'.[634] In the end, though the chiefs could put significant pressure on the young men, it is unlikely that the labourers viewed migration to the mines as a form of obligatory communal labour. Instead, it has been explicitly and frequently documented, though understated, that the opportunity of working in the mines, just like the chance of accessing British protection, was sold by the British as one of betterment. It was also accepted as such by inhabitants of the Northern Territories, who did not have access to the rich soils or minerals that would make economic and political independence a real choice; though the actual results of their engagement were often underwhelming.

Erroneously ignoring the value of economic incentivisation, the new recruitment system put significant weight on the attractions of social power. Officials trusted that an allegiance with the British would overshadow social and political disruption for the chiefs, just as they believed in the glue of tribal authority. Miners from the Northern Territories were obligated to work for a 12-month period, in contrast to the 6 months that had been the norm in previous years. Nevertheless, it was really what happened at the end of the contractual period that decisively robbed the men of their individual liberties. However, it needs to be explained first that political officials and mine management had made certain assurances to the chiefs geared towards ensuring that all recruits were back in their respective villages in time for the farming season.

There were extensive efforts to uphold the authority of the chiefs over their supposed subjects during and after the contractual period.[635] Such an emphasis is, for

[634] PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, No. 155/7/1914.
[635] The authority of chiefs was exaggerated in some European accounts. As demonstrated in a report by managers in Asante: 'I must now omit to tell you that the native labourers before [Christmas] and sometimes as early as November leave their work for home districts, returning again at the end of January,

example, observed in the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories' insistence that men from a common village work together at a particular mine; that they maintain constant communication with authorities back home; and that over several years a colonial official would accompany them down to urban areas.[636]

> For some time to come the collection of these men will be only possible by Europeans whom they know, but a staff of some sort must be provided to bring them down to Tarkwa after taking them over at some collecting station. Commissioners cannot leave their work to do this, and the staff selected should have previous experience of native, and know how to treat them. Each time that a gang runs away makes it much harder to get more from that district. As it is [,] the work of collection has thrown an enormous amount of extra work on the Commissioner, and the increased travelling round the district collecting, becomes a considerable tax on the Protectorate Transport Vote.[637]

A Commissioner escorted the men to Kumasi, and then from Kumasi to Tarkwa by train or in open trucks, 'fitted up so that a temporary roof can be made of Willisden Canvas or corrugated iron'.[638] The men were also housed in secluded mining villages where they were cut off from contact with other groups.[639] Though officially management contended that the separation was a means of protecting 'naïve' labourers from the north from being cheated by other social groups, perhaps this behaviour also had something to do with keeping them in a realm of economic ignorance.

The way in which European employers and officials made sure that labourers actually went back to their villages to assist in farming was by establishing staggered wage payments for members of this social group. Under the headship system, migrant labourers who agreed to certain advance payments were tied to a headman until the debt was paid off. However, any authority over the men, whether economic or otherwise, had

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or early in February and my own experience of this country is that nothing will induce them to remain if their Kings or their chiefs send word for them to come to pay tribute either to a King or chief lately deceased, or to even someone who has been dead many years.' LMA MS14171, vol. 2, p. 25.

636 Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana*, p. 139.

637 Ibid.

638 Ibid.

639 PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, 'CCNT to Acting Colonial Secretary', 2 December 1909.

faded away by the time the six- to twelve-month contract had been completed by the labourers. At that point the former members of a gang could choose how and where to spend wages.[640] In contrast, under the new system labourers from the Northern Territories were not able to request the entire sum of their wages once the contract was over. Instead, they received only two-fifths of what they had earned for their labour. The remaining three-fifths of the money had to be collected from the local District Commissioner in their home region.

The Secretary for Mines explained this payment system as crucial to getting men 'back to the country':[641]

> [A]rrangements were made back in Tarkwa that only 6d a day should be paid to them for subsistence and clothes, and that at the end of their year they should be given two fifths to spend on goods in Coomassie and three fifths should be drafted to the Commissioners of the District to be paid [to] them on their return to their homes.[642]

Colonial commentators often spoke of African migrants who routinely 'sat-down' in their district for a month or two, to be celebrated like heroes until they exhausted the profits of their labour, at which point they again went forth to seek employment in some other part of the coast'.[643] In the case of migrants from the Northern Territories, managers and officials colluded in the repatriation.

This oscillatory migration was not only necessary in order to keep peace with the chiefs, it was also used by employers as a way to advertise opportunities in the mining sector to potential recruits; returnees also played a critical role in promotion of the industry. It was important that the men not only came back with cash in their pockets, but

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640 Starting in the first quarter of the twentieth century, there were some wage labour jobs in the north, including in the manganese mines, and on the roads.
641 PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, 'CCNT to Acting Colonial Secretary'.
642 Ibid. This suggestion was approved without much controversy, though there were minor worries of it appearing to be forced labour.
643 Russell, 'Pidgin-English Amongst the Khroos', 206.

also with other items to show off their new wealth.[644] Colonial commentators spoke about the honour and esteem that the men earned upon returning home, as they paraded the fruit of their labour: cloths, clothes, shoes, and goods that were not easily acquired back home. In 1910 the Commissioner in Tamale, H. W. Leigh, suggested that 'the wealth of the returning boys was seen and allowed time to sink into the minds of prospective mine boys.'[645]

In Gambaga the Commissioner noticed how, '[m]ine boys sent from here returned very satisfied with clothes and money and are apparently rather envied'.[646] Another administrator observed that the 'success in the North Western Province is due to the fact that the first party sent down to work remained there, brought back cloths, boxes and some savings with them, and this had led to others going'.[647] Returnees were a wonderful argument for migration since they had seen that 'the whiteman keeps his word'.[648]

Nevertheless, in connection to this directive, there was also no possibility for employers in the mines to get men to stay. Labourers from the Northern Territories were also not encouraged to bring their wives along, though this went against the ambitions of local employers. One drawback for the companies when migrant labourers bought their spouses along was the extra money that had to be provided to the family for travel and subsistence before the work had even begun. Secretary for Mines Cogill confirmed this hesitation when he declared that family units 'of course mean that larger money advances would have to be given to the labourers, and also if they are to be brought down by train

[644] PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, 'CCNT to Acting Colonial Secretary.
[645] The Commissioner further stated: 'I think it would be a great help to the recruiting officer'.PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, 8/11/19.
[646] PRAAD ADM 56/1/177, Extract from Gambaga Diary, 12 November 1917.
[647] PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, 'CCNT to Acting Colonial Secretary'.
[648] PRAAD ADM 56/1/177, Extract from Gambaga Diary.

from Coomassie, the railway charge would be increased'.[649] Yet, he was also fully aware that the presence of wives also encouraged men to work for a lengthier period of time:

> If possible, labourers ought to be permitted to bring down their wives, as I am convinced that if they did so they would be willing to work for longer periods on the mines, and would keep in a better state of health.[650]

Cogill assured the Colonial Secretary that if 'the labourers are able to bring down their wives and families with them I see no reason why permanent villages should not be established'.[651] All that had to be done on the company's side, as he saw it, was arranging the supply of tracts of land where the families could construct homes and grow their own foods.[652] Nevertheless, officials in the north who had to deal with the complaints of the chiefs, and who were witnessing declining, or at least stagnating, economic conditions were especially uninterested in encouraging men to bring their wives.[653] Even after the political labour system was replaced in 1909, this transition occurred at a moderate pace, given the increasing authority of the colonial government in the movement of labourers within colonial Ghana.[654] A more comprehensive strategy to bring more families to the mines was first undertaken only during the interwar period.[655]

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[649] No. 1096/1909, 'Secretary for Mines F. Cogill to Colonial Secretary', Secretary for Mines Office, Mines Department, 22 November 1909.
[650] Ibid.
[651] Ibid.
[652] Ibid.
[653] That year, on 6 November, the Colonial Secretary wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Mines and the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories to inquire about the accompaniment of wives, among other conditions concerning migrant labourers from the Northern Territories that needed to be improved, such as the establishment of fixed resting place with food supplies, the provision of foods from their home regions, and having some rest between when they arrived to the mining centre and that start of their contracts. CUL RCMS 139/12/16.
[654] For example it was reported that of 444 mineworkers arriving at a mine in Tarkwa (Abbontiakoon), a mere 15 had brought their wives along for the journey'. PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, 'CCNT Tamale to Ford at Abbontiakoon Mines', 19 August 1916.
[655] It must, however, be noted that the migrants of course had their own hesitations when it came to bringing their wives into the migrant villages that were dominated by males. Many complained of their wives being harassed by other men. According to one administrator: 'With regard to their wives every effort is made to induce them to take them, so far only with partial success as they fear the Ashanti and Coast natives'. PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, 'CCNT to Acting Colonial Secretary'. Another European witness to

6. 2. The Sick, the Rebels, the Non-Returnees: The Limitations of Political Labour

The political labour system as it was established in 1905 was only a short-lived option for mine management. However, it was not only the frustration of employers in Wassa which led to its demise but, as already hinted, the actions and opinions of chiefs and labourers have to be accounted for, too. Roger Thomas has posited that because the obligation of providing cheap labourers coincided with a stream of voluntary migration to the south, chiefs only had weaker men from which to pick.[656] Stronger men, on the other hand, could travel to the South independently and negotiate a decent salary for themselves.[657] The period leading into the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed an 'exodus' of young men leaving their villages in the North in spite of protests by local chiefs who, according to officials reports, 'complain that they are left without sufficient labour to farm the land'.[658] This unintentional tactic of selecting from the bottom of the barrel of the labour reservoir, according to Roger, caused frequent outbreaks in disease that spread rapidly among migrant populations, affecting both the home regions as well as the mining centres. As early as 1906 one official commented that, 'the enlistment for labour has received a severe check, due to an endemic (cerebro spinal meningitis) raging in that part of the country'.[659] In this context it is worthwhile to mention that incidents of this kind would have been far less likely under headship. All headmen chose the members of their

these tensions reported that, every 'day brings a palaver amongst your Fantee labourers and the people of the village, thefts and misconduct with others' wives, which, fortunately, is always arranged by a money consideration'. Bowler, *Gold Coast Palaver*, p. 18.

[656] Thomas, 'Forced Labour in British West Africa'. See also, R. G. Thomas, 'Military Recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War.' *Cahiers d'etudes Africaines*, 15-1, (1975), 62.

[657] Thomas puts forward that the voluntary migration of stronger and healthier men was to blame for the increased rate of diseases such as cerebro-spinal meningitis, recorded in the mines in Wassa during the era of the political method of recruitment. Thomas, 'Forced Labour in British West Africa', 79–103. These diseases were frequently carried back to the rural areas with the consequence of several deaths.

[658] PRAAD ADM 5/1/24, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1916, p. 4.

[659] PRO CO 98/16, Annual Report on the Northern Territories for the Year 1906, s. 9.

gangs,[660] had financial incentives to get their men to work in an extended manner, and, therefore, provided a particular filtering mechanism to employment relations. In contrast, the rural chiefs' seemed to be primarily focused on reaching numerical goals to satisfy the requests of officials in their area. Such tasks could only become more difficult with time.

Related to the growing frequency of the requests and the larger number of men demanded were the instances of desertion by Northern Territories labourers, which were on the rise.[661] Desertion rates reached a new high after 1908 when officials initiated large-scale recruitment, to offset the number of labourers who were now choosing to look for work on railway construction rather than on the mines.[662] Recruits from the northeast absconded in especially large numbers. Of the first group of 540 men from Navrongo district that year, 200 had already absconded around Tamale. 258 men eventually reached Tarkwa district and the Abbontiakoon mines, though none would remain by mid-year. Future groups of labourers would also desert, hundreds at a time.

Impacted as it was by disease and disobedience, the excitement over the political method of recruitment was brief, especially from the perspective of the chiefs. As the recruitment system serving the mines in Tarkwa quickly unravelled, one point of growing contention between the chiefs and political officials was the issue of losses in so-called

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[660] Headmen working for the Government Transport Department were the exception.
[661] Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana*, p. 140.
[662] For example, 'Although in July 1909 a total of 444 migrants arrived In Tarkwa, only 363 migrants returned to Wa a year later, 16 having remained in Tarkwa, 22 having "deserted", almost 30 not yet having reported to the District Commissioner and 15 having died'. Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana*, p. 141. Prior to this wave of recruitment mine managers had attempted to bar employers on the railway from recruiting around the mines and to get the government to enforce wage rates for railway work which were below the mines', standards due to fears of poaching. Thomas, 'Forced Labour in British West Africa', 82.

‘tribal services’ due to a growing wave of voluntary independent migration.[663] By the time of the First World War many chiefs were giving the account that thousands of men were now leaving the north and going to Kumasi and the Coast, ‘where they can [get] better pay’.[664] A high number of deserters never returned home, but also many individuals who had completed their term of service simply chose not to go back. In 1909, of 500 labourers recruited by a Captain Warden from Gambaga in May, only 27 were left on the Abbontiakoon Mine in July. An astonishing 242 had deserted prior to reaching Tarkwa. The remaining 258 ‘worked in a fairly satisfactory manner until the 27th of June, on which 153 men left their work. The labourers contended that ‘they wanted to go home’. And despite all coaxing by the Secretary for Mines Cogill they eventually departed the area. Those that were left only worked for another 26 days.

Significant numbers were recorded as never even returning to their home villages to collect the remaining three fifths of their wages. Moreover, of those young men who did return home, many began to reject the authority of the chiefs. Local authorities communicated to the administration that they had to deal with a trend of insubordination from returned miners, who anticipated spending their hard-earned wages as they saw fit, and generally preferred to spend their money in the urban areas purchasing goods, which could be traded once in the north.[665] Not only were young men opposing local political structures upon their return, or not returning at all, many others were leaving out of fear of being recruited by the government in the first place. An administrator in the North complained that, this practice not only depleted certain areas in the countryside at critical

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663 PRAAD ADM 56/1/3, ‘CCNT to Secretary for Mines’, 30 December 1905.
664 PRAAD ADM 5/1/23, Report on the Northern Territories, Immigration and Emigration, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1915, p. 9.
665 PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, No. 16/132/1909.

farming times, but also that the young men were inclined to leave these areas on account of it.[666]

Local authorities were further aggravated because the external wealth that had been promised to them never materialised. For one, the men who did return home did not have large savings to show for it. Indeed, there is no evidence that African chiefs in the Northern Territories made huge financial gains from labour exports. Some chiefs eventually propositioned the state to relieve them of certain labour supply duties.

Occasional food shortages added to other hardships in the Northern Territories. According to an administrative report from 1915, local inhabitants routinely suffered from food shortages around the beginning of the rainy season in May, and demands for food were being exacerbated by local recruitment activities:

> Food is scarce in this part of the district, three small yams costing 3d, and we are demanding too much of the people in the matter of transport etc. and making them neglect the most important task of producing food.[667]

This deficiency in turn sparked a gradual rise in the price of food.[668]

In January 1910 officials moved to refurbish the recruitment system.[669] Following a meeting on 15 January between the Governor, Chief Officer Migeod, Secretary of Mines Cogill, and the Acting Commissioner, that latter three men presented a scheme 'on the recruiting and employment of Northern Territory labourers', which once again incorporated headmen:

> We are of the opinion that, in order to obtain voluntary labour, recruiting by the agency of chiefs and other influential persons must cease and we are also of the opinion that Commissioners should take no active part in the recruiting. We consider that the best method of recruiting should be based on the following […] : Any persons requiring Northern Territory labourers should appoint a native recruiting agent.[670]

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666 PRAAD ADM 5/1/23, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1915, p. 8.
667 PRAAD ADM 56/1/84, Precis of Informal Diary of CCT from 15 December to 14 February 1915.
668 PRAAD ADM 5/1/23, Gold Coast Departmental Report for the Year 1915, p. 8.
669 PRAAD ADM 56/1/85 No. 1208/1910.
670 PRAAD ADM 56/1/84.

However, given that it was still undesirable, and perhaps impossible, to control the movement of all African labourers serving the mines from an administrative perspective,[671] the headmen themselves were bombarded with regulations, which colonial officials were now deployed to check. The original handwritten version of the 'regulations and instruction as to the supply of labourers from the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast to the mines' is found in the National Archives in Accra, Ghana.[672] The new rules incorporated headmen: 'On any mining company requiring this particular class of labour the manager should send up a suitable headmen to proceed to his own country and endeavour to get his own countrymen to volunteer to accompany him back'.[673] However, it was a headship system most akin to career headship. Headmen were only to be allowed to recruit with a letter of authority; they had to check in with the District Commissioner at several stops during the process; and they had to submit their recruits to health checks during the journey to the mines.[674]

Powerful independent African headmen were thus becoming less of a probability by the first quarter of the twentieth century. However, regardless of a tighter collaboration between the mechanised mines and the administration, indigenous clientage relationships would retain relevance in this, as well as other, segments of the wage labour force in Ghana. Entrepreneurs did manage to get the government more involved in the recruitment, albeit not to the degree that they had hoped for.

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[671] In May of 1909 Giles Hunt, an attorney for some of the biggest mines in Wassa, sent yet again a proposal to the administration for labour bureau with a pass law system, this time in conjunction with a compound structure under European supervision as it had been introduced on the Witwatersrand. PRAAD ADM 56/1/84/.

[672] PRAAD ADM 56/1/84. See also, ADM 56/1/85'Draft Rules for Mine Labour by CCNT'; RCMS 139/12/14.

[673] Ibid.

[674] Ibid.

This chapter has argued for a more differentiated study of colonial labour systems in West Africa that diverted from free wage labour. Whilst studies of free wage labourers tend to emphasise the element of choice and disregard the process of dispossession, studies of non-free wage labour in Africa tend to overemphasise the elements pushing labourers into the wage labour market, i.e. the power and credit of the African intermediaries and foreign employers involved, even if there was choice involved. There is a need for more studies that accurately depict the middle ground between force and agency, whilst factoring in local circumstances.

Conclusion

Headmen and the Nationalisation of the Gold Mines

According to Lentz and Erlmann 'that the Ghanaian gold mines had been able to continually enlarge their workforce until the late I930s, hinged in part on the use of labour recruiters whose role gained even more impact during World War II when relevant parts of the mine workers were drawn into war related activities.'[675] Indeed, company records from Tarkwa District show that headmen continued to be integrated into the mining hierarchy in southwest Ghana well into the 1950s and 1960s. In 1956 the employment register of the Tarkwa and Abosso Mines Limited listed several headmen as being engaged in its various departments.[676] Moreover, they continued to earn up to 30 per cent above the salary of a regular labourer, hinting at the scope of their responsibility.[677] Up until this period headmen were also still regarded as important representatives for members of their ethnic groups, just as they continued to extend the orders of management. Yet, according to Lentz, in the following years and decades the number of headmen in the urban areas along the coast began to dwindle, and their duties were assigned to formal organisational bodies with elected boards created to bring together men of a particular social background and to contribute to the development of their home regions.[678] Yet she does not reveal why this was the case during this particular stage in Ghana's history.

675 Lentz and Erlmann, 'A Working Class in Formation?', 97-98.
676 PRAAD Sekondi, WRG 24/1/103.
677 Ibid.
678 C. Lentz, 'Ethnizität und die Interpretation der Vergangenheit,' in *Geschichte in Afrika: Einführung in Probleme und Debatten*, (eds.) Jan-Georg Deutsch, Albert Wirz, Zentrum Morderner Orient (Berlin, 1997), 162.

The ousting of headmen in favour of ethnic trade unions occurred during a period in which labourers were becoming widely disempowered, and not only in the mines, for that matter.[679] Actually, one could qualify the end of the early 1950s as a period of economic and political crisis in colonial Ghana followed by a stage of growing authoritarianism after independence. Most mining companies in Wassa, including the Tarkwa and Abosso Mines, were greatly affected by the gold miners' strike, which began in 1955. In Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah they had an advocate who earnestly believed in the importance of industrial development. In a letter sent to him on 3 January 1956, the Secretary for Mines informed Nkrumah of the plight of this company. In particular, he connected this trouble to the rebellious actions of labourers, which loomed over the entire mining industry:

> Dear Sir,
> The Chairman of Tarkwa and Abosso Mines, Ltd., Mr. Robert Annan, has made the following announcement:
>
> AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE PROLONGED STRIKE OF AFRICAN EMPLOYEES, THIS COMPANY IS NO LONGER IN A FINANCIAL POSITION TO BEAR THE COST OF KEEPING THE MINE OPEN. THE DIRECTORS HAVE THEREFORE DECIDED THAT UNLESS WORK IS RESUMED BY ALL THOSE ON STRIKE BY NOON ON MONDAY SIXTEENTH JANUARY, 1956, NOTICE WILL BE GIVEN TO ALL STAFF AND EMPLOYEES, PUMPING WILL CEASE AND THE UNDERGROUND WORKINGS ALLOWED TO FLOOD. IF THIS HAPPENS IT WILL BE IMPRACTICABLE TO RE-OPEN THE MINE AND THE PLANT AND STORES WILL BE DISPOSED OF. THIS DECISION IS BEING COMMUNICATED TO THE PRESS.[680]

The company could not afford to meet the demands of the Gold Coast Mines Employees' Union.[681] Nor could it continue to come up with the necessary capital to keep the property open and the machinery attended to pending the end of the strike.[682] Naturally,

[679] K. A. Ninsin, 'Nkrumah's Socialism: A Reappraisal', *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 9 (1979) 93-4.
[680] PRAAD Sekondi, WRG 24/1/103.
[681] Ibid.
[682] Ibid.

the halting of such a huge operation would cause severe shocks to the general economy, but more immediately to the surrounding community.

The Secretary of Mines reminded Nkrumah of the potentially horrendous consequences which stalling the mining operations would have on the company's 2,800 employees. It would bring the towns of Tarkwa and Abosso to their knees. Not only would their inhabitants suffer due to losses in income, but he explained how additional critical services in job training, health, and sanitation would vanish, too.[683] As a result of the strike, in 1958 Nkrumah, now president of the independent state of Ghana, passed the labour-disciplining Trade Union Act, which made strikes illegal. Though he had once been a leader of strikes himself, in the years to come Nkrumah would react even more rigidly to the demands of the labour force. Following Ghana's general economic decline in the 1960s, several mining firms again threatened to withdraw their capital and it was at this juncture that the state under Nkrumah's leadership took a direct interest in the development of industry by nationalising the mines, and by bolstering the rights of employers. The evidence presented here further historicises the position of headmen between labour and capital and points to labourers faring better under headmen, as compared to the trade unions that were established and run by later employers in Wassa (in this case the Ghanaian state).[684] Whilst such an origin does not necessarily imply oppression in and of itself, Nkrumah's ongoing policies were clearly moving in the direction of subduing workers' rights.

[683] Ibid.
[684] With the passing of the Industrial Relations Act of 1958, Nkrumah attempted to solve the problem of splintering and competing labour unions in the state. The Trades Union Congress of Ghana received legal recognition and its own headquarters and all workers had to become union members.

Continuity and Connectivity

This thesis has endeavoured to consider the origin and mechanics of indirect recruitment through headmen and its significance for the expansion of the wage labour market connected to the mechanised mines in southwest Ghana during the formative years of colonial rule.

It is unique in its attempt to reconstruct indirect recruitment from the earliest stage of the colonial presence. As J. F. Ade Ajayi observes in his article 'The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonialism', the most significant question that emerges from the examination of the colonial encounter 'is not whether colonial rule disrupted African institutions or whether or not the institutions have shown continuity, but rather how they have been adapted to the changing circumstances'.[685] Both the economic system and the manner in which labourers were mobilised were transformed as a result of the colonial experience in West Africa. In Ghana the headship system, which incorporated elements of 'traditional' indigenous clientage relationships, was vital to assisting recruitment for the gold mines, which were feeding the global market. Part 1 has shown the connection between reciprocity and labour mobilisation in precolonial West Africa and the significance of providing economic protections and opportunities, as well as social securities to labourers. The most prevalent manner of mobilising men outside of family labour during this time was the slave system. Yet even slaveholders employing this most coercive means of economic exploitation could not rely on domination alone. Instead, a clientage relationship was formed in which an enslaved African was imbued with certain rights, both socially and economically, though never at an equal level to the slaveholder

[685] 'The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonialism', in Terence O. Ranger (ed.), *Emerging Themes of African History: Proceedings* (Dar es Salaam, 1965), 198.

and the free members of the slaveholder's family. This study has endeavoured to highlight headship as an indigenous institution which was adapted to the needs of capitalist intensification.

While the perception that the legal end of slavery in West Africa did not break dependencies between Africans, and that European colonialism continued to rely on the contributions of African authorities to economic development, which corresponds to the findings of the existing literature, the analysis of how relationships of dependency were transformed by the colonial commerce provides further perspectives that have thus far received little attention: because the mechanised mines were developed at a stage in which wage labourers were scarce, during the nineteenth century mine managers had to accept the available forms of labour supply, especially tributary and other kinds of casual labour, albeit with reluctance. Ultimately, however, they preferred labourers who worked in a steady and extended manner, and, in a continuation from the past African economic and social authorities were responsible for mobilising the bulk of these men. The supposedly 'modern' figure that was the headman travelled to his home region, predominantly in Liberia during the nineteenth century, to convince men to sign 6- to 12-month contracts with the gold mines in Wassa. In general he himself had some experience of the world of wage labour and, in particular, of working for a foreign employer.

On the one hand the headman, in addition to recruiting labourers in small gangs, was also responsible for social control and even had a degree of judicial power over them. On the other hand he took care of the welfare of his recruits during their term of service. Given the ethnic orientation of recruitment and housing and the limited knowledge that mine managers had of the variety of languages spoken on the concessions, headmen also played an important role not only as interpreters, who passed on orders, but also as ethnic brokers, who expressed the grievances of his men via management, as well as via other groups in the mines during the entire colonial period. The dual-role perspective of African intermediaries in the colonial context aligns with recent research, which has, however, not often been applied to intermediaries in colonial commerce.[686]

In part 2, the thesis examines the varying ways in which indigenous clientage relationships were incorporated into the colonial mining structure. It argues that the incorporation procedure of headship into the mining hierarchy was successful at drastically different degrees depending on the status, means, and motivations of the labour recruiters involved. This study has attempted to describe the professional activities headship in its various forms: of career headmen, versus headmen employed by the Government Transport Department, versus independent headmen. By the turn of the twentieth century managers in Wassa were forced to develop collaborative relationships with career headmen from within a wider West African network as Liberian contract men became scarcer. Career headmen were distinguished by their dependence on the capital and/or authorisation of employers in the mechanised mines in order to conduct their recruitment activities. At the same time, the economic relationships between them and the members of their gangs were similar to the already existing headship constellation. While the existing historiography on traditional African intermediaries in colonial commerce has centred on a trajectory from slave labour to colonial forced labour, the examination of the mechanics of indirect recruitment in this thesis has underscored not just the

[686] See, for example, Lawrance, Osborn and Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks*.

sociocultural motivations, but also the economic rationale of African labourers during the early colonial period. The ability of labourers to accrue advances from mining firms and headmen, the debt protection they received during their term of service, and the generally ostensibly harsh in written form but in reality mildly punitive legislation, highlights the superior bargaining position of African labourers in the post-proclamation context in Ghana. The omission of such economic exchanges in the secondary literature, in contrast, leads to an inaccurately submissive understanding of the African worker after the legal end of slavery.

Headmen employed by the Government Transport Department mirrored the general outlook of the colonial economic policy of indirect rule. In this way, the headmen were pulled into a centralising system which mimicked supposedly traditional hierarchies and promised to follow a *laissez-faire* ideology, only to impose the will of external interests and to inadvertently strip indigenous authorities of all their power. To add to the discussion on the complex characteristics of the colonial project,[687] an essential part of colonial economic policy was weighing out the benefits of change with the maintenance of law and order. In this way, British officials employed the rhetoric of progress whilst taking a gradualist stance on the implementation of economic transformation. This thesis demonstrates some of the contradictions of colonial rule, more specifically conflicts within the colonial administration on the issue of labour, by way of a discussion of the Concessions Labour Bill of 1903. Colonial policy was informed by the individual personalities and politics of the men involved. Chief Officer Migeod of the Government Transport Department, who worked closely with and was a crucial contributor to the

[687] J. Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: the Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *English Historical Review* 112 (1997); N. J. Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Cambridge, 1994).

recruitment efforts of the gold mines in Wassa, was an advocate for increased control over African workers. However, officials in Accra resisted economic and social change that they perceived might endanger colonial order. Therefore any attempts at direct centralised control of the labour force were nullified.

Independent headmen, who having invested their own capital into recruitment also hoped to maximise the profit they gained from negotiations over wage rates, advances, etc., provide the greatest evidence of headship as an indigenous response to changes in the economy in Ghana. Although independent labour recruiters had existed before, the cocoa boom which took place around the turn of the century greatly increased the amount of capital available to indigenous entrepreneurs. Moreover, African entrepreneurs were more likely to put their earnings to work in other industries, rather than leaving them in a government bank. Investing in the recruitment business was another way to make a good return in a relatively short amount of time. Consequently, the case of independent headmen also illustrates in a more evident manner that the incorporation of this type of 'traditional' authority into the 'modern' mines also came at a cost for the mine managers. The material aspect of the recruitment process indicates that the authority of mine management over the larger population of labourers was directly dependent on the loyalty of the headman. Where independent recruiters were involved, and where they were not primarily interested in building a career as headmen, the loyalty factor was questionable. Headmen all over Africa were known to be rent-seekers, and the independent headmen were the most profit oriented of this group.

Related to the preceding point, along with the theme of continuity, this thesis has been concerned with economic connectivity; to be specific, interactions between different sectors of the economy. Raymond Dumett has produced a study of Ghanaian gold mining that takes both independent and wage labour into account. He has suggested that today, 'as historians attempt to expand the horizons of what should be included in African economic history, it is possible to examine Ghanaian gold mining from a more balanced perspective as a pursuit that embraced an indigenous sector and a modern sector'.[688] Research on migration, or the movement of labourers and gangs between these two worlds, the wage and independent market, has become more commonplace in the scholarship since he wrote these words. Terms like 'half-miner' and 'farmer-miner' have become firmly embedded into the minds of scholars of African labour history. Nevertheless, the interflows of capital between indigenous and modern commerce, which have been examined in this thesis, are rarely discussed. On the one hand, the manners in which migrant wage earners reinvested their wages from the urban areas in the home villages to build houses, to purchase land, or to fulfil certain social contracts has been touched upon in this as well as innumerable other studies of colonial mining.[689] Yet, overwhelmingly the flow of capital is captured as a unilateral interaction. The case study of mechanised mining in Wassa presented here, and in particular the business activities of independent headmen, supports the argument that while the expansion of the wage labour market was stimulated by 'modern' industry, expansion was greatly facilitated by growth in the scale of production of agricultural production, in this case cocoa. Thus, far from resisting colonial economic expansion, African workers collaborated with and aided this process through regular investments of both labour and money.

[688] Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa*, pp. 4-5.
[689] W. Beinart, 'Joyini Inkomo: Cattle Advances and the Origins of Migrancy from Pondoland'.

Part 3 agrees with other studies on the subject that the ability to use compulsion to lessen wages in colonial Ghana only came with the developments of colonial expansion and a centralising state. The recruitment of mine labourers by political officials through chiefs in the Northern Territories from 1906 presented a more cost-effective alternative for employers in the mines. Moreover, the ratio of men that could be mobilised by an individual African intermediary was much increased. Through political officials and chiefs, mining entrepreneurs managed to pressure this new group of recruits into accepting wages that were far below market rates, and into doing the most undesirable type of labour available on the mines. Nevertheless, centralised recruitment in this manner proved to be too restrictive and too much weight was put on tribal authority. After 1909 the growing levels of disease and desertion among recruits, and increasing tensions among chiefs who had to deal with unprecedented levels of disobedience, led the mines back to a headship system, albeit under close colonial regulation this time. This thesis has aimed to expand on the discussion of colonial forced labour by comparing headship and political labour, looking at the identifiable economic and social ramifications of both systems from the perspectives of the labourers and the African intermediaries.

The literature on 'invented' African traditions has thus far primarily been applied to the literature on mining in South Africa to explain how African labourers organised themselves; the 'new life-worlds' that they constructed out of bits and pieces of older customs.[690] The historiography of mining in West Africa has predominantly pointed to evidence of sustained links to an older social order among mining labourers by highlighting the ability of African chiefs to pressurise men into working for the colonial

[690] Moodie and Ndatshe, *Going for Gold*, p. 42.

mines for rates that were far below market value. This study has added a further aspect to this theme in African mining history by highlighting continuities in the economic lives of African workers as they adapted to the colonial wage labour market.

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