DECOLONIZATION, THE COLONIAL STATE, AND CHIEFTAINCY IN THE GOLD COAST

RICHARD C. CROOK

THE PURPOSE of this article is to suggest a reinterpretation of the relationship between the colonial state and chieftaincy in the Gold Coast, looking in particular at the interaction between land law, class formation and the structure of indirect rule. The need for such a reinterpretation is prompted by the implausibility (in my view) of much of the very large standard literature on the subject, when viewed from the perspective of the decolonization period of the 1950s. During the 1950s, the colonial chieftaincy in the British African colonies was abandoned by colonial governments, together with the structure of administration known as 'indirect rule'. The change was ostensibly part of a programme of devolution of power to a new elite of 'educated' Africans, either elected to local or central government bodies, or recruited into an Africanized administration. By the end of the decade—beginning with the Gold Coast in 1957—local self-government by these new groups formed the basis for a new policy of granting sovereign independence to all of the colonial territories, large or small. The demise of the chieftaincy has, therefore, been seen as inextricably linked to this process of decolonization, not simply because it preceded decolonization chronologically, but because it was an integral part of the reforms which determined the political form of independence—the so-called 'Westminster model'. With historical hindsight it has been easy to accept the inevitability of progress, to see the chieftaincy as a doomed institution which made sense in the context of high colonialism, but had to go when colonialism itself, for whatever reason, came to an end.

Such assumptions, however, continue to beg a number of questions. First, why was it that the policy which the British had always maintained was at the heart of their colonial trusteeship—encouraging the development of the African 'along his own lines', including forms of self-government—*why* was this policy changed so radically after the Second

The author is Lecturer in Politics at Glasgow University. This article began life as a seminar paper presented at the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham in 1984. It was subsequently presented at the York Conference of the ASAUK in September 1984, and discussed at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London in October of the same year. The author is grateful to all those who made comments and suggestions at those seminars; he remarks that 'some will find in the footnotes at least a partial acknowledgement of their help, others will notice the corrections in the text!'

World War? Secondly, did the reforms implemented in the late 1940s and early 1950s actually lead to independence, in the form and at the time at which it occurred—or were there intervening variables? And thirdly, how was such a radical change in the political basis of the colonial state carried out without any apparent costs in terms of political or administrative control? The Gold Coast is especially important in this argument because, 'as every schoolboy knows', it was the first 'black' African colony to be given independence.

The vast body of scholarly research, both historical and anthropological, which exists on the subject of the chieftaincy and the transition from Indirect Rule to democratic forms of self-government and independence, has changed quite considerably in the kinds of answers it currently gives to these questions. In the historiographical review which follows, a dividing line is drawn between 'pre-revisionist' literature, i.e. that written before around 1975–6, and 'revisionist' history, i.e. research based on the newly-opened post-1945 British imperial archives.

Historiographical Review

(i) Pre-revisionist literature In this literature the centrality of the chieftaincy, as it became incorporated into the colonial state through the NA system, is firmly established.[1] Many of the detailed studies, particularly in anthropology, focus on the 'problems' of the colonial chief's role in relation to his subjects, the contradictions in authority and values, the impact of commercialization and so on. Nevertheless, historians agree that following the creation of the Colony Provincial Councils in 1925, and the Ordinances of 1927 in the Colony and 1932 and 1935 in the NTs and Ashanti respectively, the power and authority of the chiefs in Gold Coast colonial society was consolidated and strengthened. The colonial government's commitment to the chiefs was seemingly unshakeable, and bolstered by an increasingly elaborated ideology which sought political legitimation through a romantic notion of cultural trusteeship—Kimble quotes Guggisberg's book of 1929 (*The Future of the Negro*)—'we must aim at the

1. A selection of the main sources would include: R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford, 1929); Lord Hailey, *Native Administration in the British African Territories, Part III* (London 1951) and *General Survey, Part IV* (London, 1951); K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti* (London 1951); M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems* (London 1940); D. Apter, *The Gold Coast in Transition* (Princeton, 1955); D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana, 1850–1928* (London 1963); W. Tordoff, *Ashanti under the Prempehs, 1888–1935* (London 1965); M. Crowder and O. Ikime, (eds), *West African Chiefs* (New York, 1970); D. Brokensha, *Social Change at Larteh, Ghana* (London, 1966); L. H. Gann and P. Duignan, (eds), *The History and Politics of Colonialism, 1914–1960* (Cambridge, 1970), especially chapters by K. W. J. Post, M. Crowder and M. Kilson; M. Owusu, *Uses and Abuses of Political Power* (Chicago, 1970); J. Dunn and A. F. Robertson, *Dependence and Opportunity: Political Change in Ahafo* (Cambridge, 1973); and M. Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana* (Cambridge, 1975).

development of the people along their own racial lines, and not at the wholesale replacement of their ancient civilizations by our own ...'.[2] Apter, writing in 1955, quotes similar sentiments: 'These Provincial Councils are really the breakwaters defending our [*sic*!] native constitutions, institutions and customs against the disintegrating waves of Western civilization'.[3] In retrospect, not unworthy ideals, and ones with which an African nationalist of the 1980s might well agree. But in the 1920s, they justified not only the colonial administration's acceptance of the chiefs as the true representatives of their people, but also the corollary—the administration's contempt for and dismissal of educated African politicians.[4] Even the reformed Burns Constitution of 1946 gave a majority voice to the NAs at the central level of politics. In interpreting the post-1951 period, therefore—the period when the chieftaincy was abandoned by its former masters and power handed over to nationalist politicians—the standard literature points to such factors as the rise of mass anti-colonial movements led by educated Africans of a 'new generation' and changes in imperial policy in the 1950s.[5] These factors have to be assumed to be very powerful, insofar as they overthrew the apparently immutable alliance of chiefs and administration with which the period opened.

(ii) Revisionist literature With the opening of the archives of the post-war Imperial government, historians and political scientists such as Hargreaves, Flint, Gifford and Louis, Lee and Pearce have amended the above picture in a number of ways, the two major shifts being (a) a switch of emphasis away from mass nationalist movements back to imperial policy—even to the extent of asserting that imperial policy was the prime mover or independent variable—and, (b) a pushing back of the timing of changes in imperial policy, on such matters as indirect rule, or self-government, to the early 1940s or, in Flint's case, to 1938–9.[6] The current historiography tends to give a common answer to the first

2. Kimble, *Political History*, p. 486.
3. Apter, *Gold Coast*, p. 134.
4. See Post in Gann and Duignan, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
5. *ibid.*, p. 54; see also Apter, *Gold Coast*, pp. 170–2; D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946–60* (London, 1964), p. 27.
6. See J. Flint, 'Planned decolonization and its failure in British Africa', *African Affairs* **82,** 328, (1983); J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1982); P. Gifford and W. R. Louis (eds), *The Transfer of Power in Africa: Decolonization 1940–60* (New Haven and London, 1982); R. F. Holland, *European Decolonization 1918–1981* (London, 1985); A. H. M. Kirk-Greene (ed.), *The Transfer of Power: the Colonial Administrator in the Age of Decolonization* (Oxford, 1979); J. M. Lee and M. Petter, *The Colonial Office, War and Development Policy* (London, 1982); D. J. Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development* (5 vols) (London, 1980); W. H. Morris-Jones & G. Fischer (eds), *Decolonisation and After* (London, 1980); and R. D. Pearce, *Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial Policy 1938–48* (London, 1982); 'The Colonial Office in 1947 and the transfer of power in Africa' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* **10,** 2, (1982), and 'The Colonial Office and Planned Decolonization in Africa' *African Affairs* **83,** 330 (1984).

question—*why* the change in policy on Indirect Rule—and recent contributions by Flint and Pearce, whilst making some important new points, are no exception. The explanation for the demise of the chieftaincy, they say, is to be found in London.

According to Flint, as early as 1938–9, and according to Pearce not until 1947, imperial policy makers decided to replace Indirect Rule with a democratic form of self-government which would appeal to the new African educated classes. They, and other historians, point to a scepticism about the chieftaincy in London circles epitomized by such comments as: 'Africans cannot be preserved as interesting museum exhibits' indefinitely[7] and (in relation to the Governor of Sierra Leone) that the Governor 'ought to get off his high horse and remember that you can't do the 'Sanders of the Rivers' stuff in Freetown'.[8] Why were such changes being contemplated? Because the British were planning decolonization and the aim of self government required the cooperation of these new Westernized Africans. Decolonization as a policy rested either on an 'unspoken assumption' that self-government required democratic legitimacy for central government which only these African elites could deliver (Flint) or, that a deliberate pre-emption of nationalist demands was required to avoid making the mistakes of the Indian Empire (Pearce).[9] In both variants of the argument, decolonization is a policy adopted for imperial reasons, rather than the acknowledgement either of the intrinsic failures of Indirect Rule, or of the power of nationalist movements. Particularly in Flint's arguments, the *reasons* for a decolonization decision in 1938–9 remain obscure. Pearce's case rests more solidly on the widely acknowledged significance of the 1947 Report on African Policy produced for the Colonial Office by Cohen and Caine. He asserts that 1947 must be seen as a turning point, when Indirect Rule was abandoned and a 'consistent and conscious strategy of decolonization emerged.'[10] The reason was simply a recognition of the political inevitability of independence; only the timing remained to be determined, and for this the British were prepared to respond to the fledgling nationalists' successes at building mass support for independence. Flint's argument, on the other hand, is more in line with that of historians such as Gallagher; the decision to decolonize and the end of Indirect Rule are not permitted any connection with so-called 'nationalism', even of a pre-emptive kind. Hence Gallagher's comment that imperial policy was the 'Frankenstein' which called forth the 'monster' of anti-colonial nationalism.[11]

7. Pearce *Turning Point*, p. 47.
8. J. Hargreaves in Morris-Jones and Fischer, *Decolonisation and After*, p. 86. This was written in 1939.
9. Flint, 'Planned decolonization', p. 397; Pearce, in *African Affairs* **83** (1984), p. 92.
10. Pearce, *Ibid.*, p. 86.
11. Gallagher, *Decline, Revival and Fall*, p. 148.

Whatever the reasons given for a decolonization decision, whether in 1938 or 1947, the assertion that such a decision existed performs a clear function in relation to explanations of the end of Indirect Rule. The direction of causation has been reversed; the outcome—independence in 1957 or 1960—has been used to explain the political reforms of the 1940s. By imputing an 'intention to decolonize' in 1940s policy making, an explanation of the end of Indirect Rule is derived from what happened a decade later. Of course both Flint and Pearce are aware of this problem, and are careful to disclaim the existence of an imperial plan which was actually implemented in its original purity. Indeed Flint argues that the plan for decolonization had 'failed' as early as 1951–2, insofar as the substantive reforms envisaged as necessary preludes to independence never came to fruition.[12] (Flint's argument rests crucially upon what he *means* by decolonization, as will be seen further on in the discussion.) Pearce, too, admits that the 'ideas of 1947' were never realised. Nevertheless the logic of the argument is unshaken; plans that fail, or plans that are liberal and response-oriented are still intentions which, once imputed, can be used to explain what was being done in the 1940s.

The circularity of these arguments about the meaning of 1940s reforms is only broken by considering the alternative possibility; instead of assuming that Indirect Rule went because of the plan for decolonization, let us suppose—as many historians now argue—that the reforms of the 1940s, whatever their precise date, did not intend decolonization in its minimum sense of self-determination for the colonies within a foreseeable or proximate time period. This argument points to Britain's continuing military power in the post-war world, and to the apparent determination of the Attlee government to revive and deepen the African empire even after the loss of India. The plans for political reform were, it is argued, an adjunct to the main thrust of policy, which was to develop the imperial estates to the 'mutual benefit' of colonial and metropolitan interests. 'Self-government' meant finding new collaborating elites who would, by accepting voluntarily a new form of association with Britain, help to preserve the British connection.[13] The doctrine of viability was crucial to this policy, combining social welfare elements (particularly education) with a programme of economic development geared as far as possible to individual territories.[14] This early form of autarchic developmentalism was based on the supposition that stable self-government of the Dominion type was

12. Flint, 'Planned decolonization', pp. 410–1.
13. D. Fieldhouse and D. Austin in Gifford and Louis, *Transfer of Power*, p. 490 and p. 232; Gallagher *op. cit.*, p. 144; Morgan *op. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 21; M. Cowen, 'Early years of the CDC: British state enterprise overseas during late colonialism', *African Affairs* **83,** 330 (1984), pp. 63–4.
14. Lee and Petter, *Colonial Office*, p. 217.

impossible without an industrial and agricultural base capable of sustaining the more ambitious social and political structures planned. Some colonies, it was felt, were self-evidently incapable of ever sustaining such a development which in any case would take many generations even in the most promising situations.[15] In this view of imperial policy, therefore—an establishment version of 'neo-colonialism' theory—the real end of empire and the decision to scuttle is marked by the abandonment of 'viability' at the end of the 1950s.[16] The decolonization decision, then, is pushed forward, with very important consequences for our understanding of the imperial or metropolitan dimension of policy-making. Attempts to situate the decolonization policy in the 1940s can be seen to suffer from either the improbable piety or determined ambiguity of official thinking. Morgan and Lee also show in convincing detail how the post-war plans for African social and economic development turned out to be, quite simply, beyond Britain's capabilities, at least within an imperial framework.[17] It then becomes quite plausible to argue, even without the benefit of archival data, that by the late 1950s the British political elite had decided that empire was finished. And it was only in this later period that the belief that political developments could be controlled through judicious reforms and timely concessions—a belief at the heart of 1940s policy-making—came to be seen as naively optimistic.

What the British themselves meant by 'self government' is at the heart of the current debate. The evidence now being presented by historians shows that 1940s policies were, at the very least, ambiguous. Questions concerning the significance of British economic plans for the colonies, the role of colonial dollar earnings, the priority assigned to 'viability' in social and economic terms and the degree to which the rhetoric of self-government concealed as much as it revealed about imperial intentions cannot be disposed of by proving that there was no neo-colonial conspiracy to fix up a 'false independence'. Nor can the ambiguity be resolved as a problem of 'timing'; self-government meaning the achievement of reformed or modernized forms of African local administration within a few generations is qualitatively different from handing over sovereign independence within ten years and without conditions. The more extreme versions of the 'plan that failed' argument come close to admitting this. Sceptics such as Gallagher and Low now argue that the attempt at political engineering was a 'sorry delusion', and that control over the 'pace and

15. Morgan, *op. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 33.
16. *ibid.* p. 96 and p. 307; Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 191 and 200; Austin in Gifford and Louis *op. cit.*, p. 236. See also B. Schaffer 'The concept of preparation', *World Politics* **18,** (1965) and H. Tinker's review of M. Lee, *Colonial Development and Good Government*, in *Government and Opposition* **3,** 2, 1968, for percipient prerevisionist anticipations of this argument.
17. Lee and Petter, *op. cit.*, p. 215 and p. 243; Morgan *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 182–96; vol. 5, pp. 88–93.

form' of change was quickly lost.[18] If this was so, then we have once again to understand what this 'political engineering' was supposed to be about, and why Indirect Rule was considered eventually to have no part to play in the reforms contemplated but never fully implemented.

Once the problem of explaining the reforms of the 1940s is separated from the explanation of decolonization in the late 1950s, it also becomes much easier to give plausible answers to the second and third questions posed earlier: the nature of the historical connection between those reforms and the later decolonization policy, and the issue of political control. A simple first step is to acknowledge that decolonization can arguably be seen to *follow on* from the failure of reform and attempts at socio-economic development without necessarily arguing that decolonization was always the intention of those reforms. To discuss the sequence of events between 1940 and 1960 in terms of a plan that failed serves only to divert attention from a more difficult and interesting set of questions. A more fruitful conceptualization of the problem would have to acknowledge that what took place was an interaction between a bewilderingly rapid series of policy changes at the London level with a varied set of responses to crises at the level of individual colonies. It is difficult to envisage a Colonial Office master plan which can explain the change from policies of 'modernizing the NAs' to 'neo-colonialism using educated Africans' to 'independence without viability' all (in the Gold Coast) within seven years *and* simultaneously explain the changing power relationships between colonial government and colonial society. The rapidity of change has served to conceal the significance of the changes themselves. The assumption that the chieftaincy, for instance, was swept away in order to prepare for decolonization is an illusion produced by the shortness of the interval, particularly in the Gold Coast, between the inauguration of the chiefs' replacements and the coming of independence with Parliamentary-style constitutions. The speed of the transition is made even more startling when it is realized that the policy of reforming or modernizing the Indirect Rule system lasted well into the 1950s in some cases, and until 1951–2 in the Gold Coast.

It is important to insist, therefore, that there were three quite separate sets of policies in the period 1940 to 1960. The distinction between them is often blurred by the revisionist historiography, particularly the difference between the policy for modernizing the Native Authorities, and its successor, the policy of creating democratic institutions which would accommodate the educated 'nationalist' African elites. For an explanation of these stages both Flint and Pearce return to the plan for decolonization,

18. D. Low in Gifford and Louis, *Transfer of Power*, p. 27; Gallagher, *Decline, Revival and Fall*, p. 153.

which in its 1940s guise is made to be the prime cause of the decision taken for clearly quite different reasons in the late 1950s. The reluctance to admit other explanations of those earlier transitions in policy is, of course, governed by the obsession with proving imperial initiative as the prime mover in the pre-nationalist period. As will be shown below, however, the nationalist pressure denied by the revisionists may be something of a straw man. One can deny the significance of the nationalists without necessarily accepting that an imperial plan for decolonization is the principle explanation of the 1940s reforms as they actually occurred in the individual colonies.

The perspective offered, then, by the revisionist historiography presents many new and interesting insights, particularly concerning the extent to which reformist thinking gathered pace during the Second World War, and the extent to which a yawning gap existed between London scepticism about the value of Indirect Rule, and the apparent determination of colonial administrations to continue along the lines set by that policy. But the new research also reveals the ambiguity of much of the reform mooted in the 1940s, in terms both of its goals and its motivations; and it seems to point quite clearly to the fact that decolonization, defined as independence, was a decision taken in the late 1950s for reasons quite different from those considered relevant in the 1940s. The main explanation for both the attempt to modernize Indirect Rule and its abandonment remains a circular one; both developments are seen as part of the plan for decolonization, an imperial initiative which, because the outcome in sequential terms was decolonization, is interpreted as having intended that outcome, however imperfectly.

Any attempt to explain the demise of the chieftaincy and its place in the decolonization process in one particular colony must, therefore, adopt a framework of analysis which specifically separates the explanatory factors relevant at each stage in the sequence of events between 1940 and 1960. In the analysis of the Gold Coast which follows, it is argued that the explanation for both the policy of reforming the NAs and its abandonment after 1951 is to be found in the nature of the colonial state, in particular its weakness and 'externality' or lack of rootedness in colonial society. This juridical, economic and political crisis of the colonial state was cumulative, and was revealed by the popular upheavals of the 1940s and their aftermath which, whether or not they were led by 'nationalists', did cause a rethinking of colonial policy. The initial response to these upheavals was to continue reforming the NAs, a policy abandoned as a result of the ineffectiveness and lack of cooperation of the chieftaincy itself. The revelation that the chiefs could be abandoned without significant loss of control was a lesson, perhaps not fully appreciated at the time, in the lack of rootedness of an institution which had always been thought to be the crucial link between

colonial state and society. The brief period of evolutionary democracy which followed should not, therefore, be seen as an experiment which got out of control, and hence forced a decolonization decision; on the contrary, it was a successful accommodation to the demands of a group which, admittedly, had even weaker links with rural society than the chiefs but which nevertheless was easier to satisfy than the urban mobs and farmers' movements of the 1940s.

The nationalists presented themselves as the obvious 'solution' to the crisis. But the change was not a solution, insofar as the abandonment of the chieftaincy in favour of the nationalists did not affect the fundamental character of state-society relations. The oddity of the decolonization decision, then, is that it followed so rapidly on this successful accommodation, but before it had had time to fill the political vacuum revealed (but not caused) by the demise of the chieftaincy. In other words, decolonization in the late 1950s did not follow either from the failure of reform or from loss of control. The nationalists were simply easier to persuade—indeed did not need to be persuaded—that political independence was the solution to the economic and social problems of colonial society. In this sense, the revisionist historians are correct to emphasize the imperial factor, but for the late 1950s not the late 1940s. For it is only by reference to this factor that one can explain the precipitous abandonment of the unfinished experiment with evolutionary democracy. On the other hand the revisionist historians miss the crucial point in regard to the 1940s, which is that whilst 'nationalism' may not have forced the British to adopt a decolonization policy, a more fundamental crisis in relations between the colonial state and society in the 1940s did lead to first the radical modification and then the abandonment of Indirect Rule. There is no need to discover a Whitehall plan for decolonization in 1943, or 1947, to explain these changes.

The End of Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast

Between 1944 and 1954 there was an attempt to turn the Indirect Rule system in the Gold Coast into a form of 'modern' local government. It was not finally abandoned until a few years after the role of the chieftaincy in the central political institutions of the colony was formally ended in 1954. Revisionist historians who, as indicated above, see the 1950s rather than the 1940s as the key period, would still interpret these changes as a cunning piece of metropolitan *dirigisme,* a neo-imperial ploy to replace one set of colonial collaborators with another. The problem with this interpretation is twofold: first, it does not fit the local reality of policy as conceived and implemented in the Gold Coast itself, and secondly it does not explain the very rapid abandonment of the policy of reform, much later than would have been anticipated by those who emphasize the 1940s,

without any apparent loss of control. How could the colonial state so easily abandon an ideology and a set of institutions which it had spent 30 to 40 years building up, and which it had always maintained was its central rationale?

First, closer examination of the Gold Coast reforms of 1951 shows them to have been a long way short of the Cohen–Caine vision of 1947. (The same is true *a fortiori* of other colonies.) And local policy in the years 1947–1951 seems in fact to have been pointing in the opposite direction. Whilst Burns had, as a reforming Governor, pushed the Colonial Office into accepting an African unofficial majority in the Legislative Council in 1946, this new Constitution was based firmly on the Joint Provincial Council and Ashanti Confederacy Council as electoral colleges.[19] And it followed on the 1944 comprehensive reform of the NAs and Native Courts in the Colony, a reform which in every sense embodied the high point of Indirect Rule. Under the 1944 Ordinances, the government at last regularized the appointment of chiefs, established Treasuries with regular tax income (thus dramatically increasing the revenue of the NAs) and rationalized the system of Native Courts.[20] In Ashanti too Finance Committees and NA Advisory Committees had been in operation since 1940, in pursuance of a policy of encouraging greater 'interest' on the part of educated Africans in NA affairs.[21] Even the 1951 Constitution itself, under which Nkrumah and the CPP took power, provided for 37 of the 75 seats in the new Assembly to be elected by the chiefly Territorial Councils.[22] The 1952 local government reforms in the Gold Coast, whilst separating for the first time chiefly or traditional councils from the new local government authorities, retained for the chiefs a one-third representation on the latter bodies.[23] The constitution of the local Native Courts, moreover, was not secularized until 1958, after independence.[24] And it was not until 1954 that the chiefs were ousted from the central legislature and a directly elected assembly of 104 members set up.[25] The dramatic changes did not occur, then, until 1954, a fact which reemphasizes the rapidity of change after 1951, a change apparently unthought of in 1950 and not, except with hindsight, necessarily prefigured in the 1951 constitution.

In truth, the new London-inspired policy of preparation for 'self-government' did not seem to have prepared anybody for the idea that the government would be handed over to people despised only the previous

19. Hargreaves in Gifford and Louis, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
20. Hailey, *Native Administration*, pp. 206–8.
21. Busia, *Position of the Chief*, pp. 158–60.
22. The Coussey Commission whose recommendations were reflected in the Constitution was packed with chiefly representatives: Apter, *Gold Coast*, p. 176 and p. 180.
23. D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana* (London, 1964), p. 158.
24. See R. Crook, 'Local elites and national politics in Ghana', unpublished PhD, thesis, University of London (1978), p. 54 and pp. 152–3.
25. Austin, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

year as unrepresentative and irresponsible agitators; the paradox was deepened by the intensification of the colonial relationship in both political and economic terms during the 1950s, to a peak which it had never achieved during the colonial period proper.[26]

How did the Gold Coast colonial administration itself see its policy in this period? Clearly there was a tension between London and Gold Coast government appreciations of what was desirable or feasible in the way of reform, as we shall see. Yet if we assign primacy to the Gold Coast government it is still difficult to understand what it *thought* it was doing, other than facing both ways at once. Those at the top clearly continued to believe that reforming the chieftaincy was a viable option; and it seems implausible to assume that British colonial administrators experienced a Pauline conversion which enabled them suddenly to see the merits and virtues of Nkrumah's 'Standard 7' boys. Indeed, we have the evidence of many officers who lived through this period that they, especially the DCs at the grass roots, were sceptical of the pace of change, and felt that 'at the bottom level ... it's all a fraud'.[27] Attitudes to the new political class differed, of course; as former Governor Turnbull said 'The man who read the Economist [or New Statesman] wouldn't behave exactly the same toward a politician as a man who gained his entry through stroking the Jesus First Eight'.[28] And by no means all Governors, even the most reformist, were of the 'Economist-reading' variety!

Nevertheless in spite of local attitudes the changes *were* made, in a remarkably rapid way. And this raises the second problem of interpretation; how did the colonial government come to abandon its long standing policies and its erstwhile key collaborators in the local population so easily and so rapidly—albeit later in the day than has hitherto been assumed? No doubt in the Gold Coast the prodding of a 'liberal' Governor (Arden-Clarke) after 1949 was a local factor of some importance; we do not know whether he read the 'Economist', but clearly he pushed a sceptical and in some cases hostile administration as far as he was able. Metropolitan direction was too weak and contradictory to be other than an indirect and general influence on local reform. The Governor himself was only an 'agent' of Whitehall in a very tenuous sense; we do not need to posit a dictatorial Colonial Office which, even after the war-time experience constantly reminded impatient ministers of its persuasive rather than executive role.[29] The *Journal of African Administration,* which during the 1950s

26. Hargreaves in Gifford and Louis, *Transfer of Power,* p. 134. The new emphasis on combining political reform with socio-economic development had been prefigured in the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1940 and 1945.
27. Kirk-Greene, *Colonial Administrator,* p. 87.
28. *ibid.,* p. 157.
29. Lee and Petter, *Colonial Office,* pp. 194–9. On Arden-Clarke's role see: R. J. A. R. Rathbone, 'The Transfer of Power in Ghana, 1945–57', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of London, 1968,. pp. 111, 141 and 242.

preached the Office line that representative local government was what colonialism was all about, was hardly the equivalent of an imperial *ukase*.[30] In any event, officers in the field had barely got used to the idea that they were patiently building the foundations of African self-government, when full independence was decreed.[31] Nor, on the other hand, do we need to resurrect the former 'nationalist' explanation. As shall be shown in greater detail, the upheavals of the 1940s were important in causing certain responses by colonial governments, but they did not necessarily have much to do with the nationalist elites, and do not in themselves explain the decision to abandon attempting to reform the chieftaincy. Above all, neither of the above explanations, whether it is the 'pressure from below' thesis, or 'pressure from above', in the shape of liberal Governors and Whitehall, helps to explain how it was possible for such changes to be made, and made as rapidly and as smoothly as they were. Understanding the influences on policy-making is not the same as understanding what actually happened, as an historical and social process. For this, one must return to an analysis of the crisis in colonial state-society relations which emerged most starkly in the Gold Coast of the 1940s and pose the question: was the colonial state *ever* quite what it seemed, both to contemporary official apologists and to latter day historians?

The Colonial State, Chieftaincy and Land Law

One of the basic characteristics of the Gold Coast colonial state has long been known, but only recently remarked upon. It is a characteristic which it shared with many other African colonies, namely that it was and remains (as Ghana does today) a mercantilist or 'customs post' state, deriving its revenues from the surplus of an externally-oriented trading economy.[32] In 1938, 98·5 per cent of tax revenues in the Gold Coast came from indirect taxes; before 1926 import and export duties were the only forms of indirect taxation, with 75 per cent of revenues in 1930–31 coming from import taxes alone.[33] The Gold Coast, moreover, was singled out by generations of

30. See Ronald Robinson's 'retrospective' on the role of the Journal: 'The Journal and the transfer of power, 1947–51' *Journal of Administration Overseas* **13,** 1, (1974); also Lee and Petter *op. cit.*, p. 254, on the formation of the African Studies Branch of the CO.

31. The comments of an official reviewer in the *Journal of African Administration* **8,** 2 (1956) p. 107, neatly encapsulate the conventional wisdom of the time: 'More and more Americans [now] admit that the African question is not one of how to end European rule but one of building something to take its place.'

32. See R. Crook 'Bureaucracy and politics in Ghana: a comparative perspective', in P. Lyon and J. Manor (eds), *Transfer and Transformation: Political Institutions in the New Commonwealth* (Leicester, 1983), p. 186. C.f. Lonsdale's comments on the low degree of 'statishness' of the colonial state, and its reliance on the 'peasant marketing chain'; 'State and Peasantry in Colonial Africa', in R. Samuel (ed.) *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London, 1981), pp. 107 and 111, and 'States and Social Processes in Africa' *African Studies Review* **24,** 2/3, (1981) pp. 190–1.

33. Lord Hailey *An African Survey* (London, 1956) p. 682; G. B. Kay *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana* (Cambridge, 1972) p. 348; W. P. Holbrook 'The impact of the Second World War on the Gold Coast, 1939–45', unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1978, p. 19.

colonial government advisers and despairing Governors for its failure to impose *any* form of direct taxation on the native population.[34] Only the Northern Territories had a formal NA tax, established in 1932, but this was wholly retained by the NAs themselves.[35] It was not until 1943 that an income tax was collected, mainly from the mining companies and employees, and in 1944 the first formally established NA rate in the Colony.[36] Of course, colonial governments conveniently overlooked the extent to which the population was taxed by arbitrary levies and collections made by the NAs for the purposes of supporting the stools; nevertheless the fact remained that the Gold Coast government did not have to use its intermediaries in local society as tax farmers or agents in even the most limited sense. That this was made possible by the emergence of the cocoa economy in southern Ghana need not be rehearsed here; the significance of the happy fiscal position of the colonial government is best appreciated through comparative analysis.

In India under East India Company rule, the colonial state 'latched on' (as Washbrook puts it), to the agrarian class structure, allocating the patronage of the state land revenue system to those whose traditional status conveyed rights to avoid or apportion revenue. Landed property was, therefore, not emancipated from political institutions; rather, it was incorporated into the state, which supported the particular property rights e.g. serfdom, of its revenue-collecting gentry.[37] In Africa, perhaps only the Kano lands of Northern Nigeria and the pre-1928 Buganda chieftaincy formed the basis of a similar system.[38] In other areas, including the Gold Coast colony and Ashanti, political statuses existed which had the potential for development from 'tribute' forms of land claims into more regular forms of land tax, although not, of course a land revenue system proper. When the commercialization of land in southern Ghana began in earnest at the turn of the 19th century, it is clear that the chiefs were already attempting this kind of a conversion.[39] But the oddity of the Gold Coast colonial

34. See Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
35. Hailey, *African Survey* (1956) p. 666.
36. Hailey *op. cit.* (1951) p. 198 and p. 208; see also M. Wight, *The Gold Coast Legislative Council* (London, 1947), p. 189.
37. D. A. Washbrook, 'Law, state and society in colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* **15,** 3 (1918), p. 664. Land revenue accounted for nearly half of total Government of India revenues at the end of the 19th century and remained the largest single source until the early 1920s; see D. Kumar (ed.) *The Cambridge Economic History of India,* vol. 2 (Cambridge 1983), pp. 916–9.
38. Hailey, *Native Administration,* p. 77; see Wrigley in L. Fallers, *The King's Men* (London, 1964), p. 42. The comparison with Uganda and also with Kenya is instructive, since it may be argued that the 'partiality' of the post-colonial state in both these countries, and its greater involvement in civil conflict, is directly related to the state's greater degree of rootedness during the colonial period. Cf. Londsale, 'States and Social Processes', p. 204.
39. See Dunn and Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–3; and W. Birmingham, I. Neustadt and E. N. Omaboe, *A Study of Contemporary Ghana, vol. 2, Some Aspects of Social Structure* (London, 1967), Chapter 8, for a good general survey.

state was that it never engaged directly with agrarian society, in the sense of incorporating and supporting either a landlord class or a landed 'gentry' (that is, land owners with political statuses or functions); it did not even support, or need, tax collectors or tax farmers. On the contrary, when wealthy commercial farmers began to emerge who also happened to be chiefs, the colonial state tried to *prevent* their consolidation into a 'gentry', when it became clear that chiefs were attempting to amalgamate Stool and family land revenues utilizing the legal and political powers afforded them by the state. In other words, the colonial state was not prepared to underwrite or incorporate an incipient and as yet private landlordism. It did not enforce laws which would facilitate the conversion of the private wealth accumulated by chiefs into landed property. If this seems an argument which smacks of functionalism ('the mercantilist state did not need a landed gentry, therefore one did not emerge'), it should be emphasized that such an outcome was also a paradoxical and partially unintended consequence of the ideological and legal orthodoxies which came to dominate the colonial state.[40]

For an explanation and justification of the above assertion, one must return to the development of the so-called Indirect Rule system and its effect on relations between the chieftaincy and the state. The key to this development is undoubtedly the failure of the Lands and Forestry Bills of 1894, 1897 and 1912. These Bills were attempts by the colonial government to take over the administration and allocation of land rights, particularly of so-called unoccupied or 'waste' lands, and to make 'absolute' ownership of land more certain through a land certification scheme. The underlying purpose of the legislation was to control the current concessions boom and its attendant abuses, and, in the case of the 1911 Bill, to give the government power to establish publicly owned and controlled Forest Reserves. The legislation was abandoned in the face of considerable opposition from both the chiefs and their lawyer/intelligentsia allies of the ARPS and the local press, together with European commercial interests.[41] The argument of the opposition, which was to become elaborated in legal textbooks and treatises on land tenure, was that 'there is no land without an owner', and that land apparently unused was 'community' land which the local Stool, as the embodiment of the community, held in trust for the

40. I agree with Lonsdale that 'To obtain an historical engagement between African peasantry and colonial state, one must . . . concentrate more on the conditions of reproduction for both'. Lonsdale, 'State and Peasantry', p. 110; but this is only a starting point. One cannot 'read off' the Gold Coast state's venture into the politics of Indirect Rule from its need to secure its tax base. The introduction of Native Treasuries in the 1930s was in fact counter-productive for the economic interests of both state and chiefs. But this did not become clear until the 1940s.

41. See Kimble, *Political History*, pp. 330–70 and *passim*.

living and future generations.[42] As Luckham (and Kimble before him) have observed 'there was at least temporarily a coincidence of interest between these local groups [chiefs, merchants and professional men] and foreign concessionaires who also preferred to negotiate their concessions with a minimum of interference from the colonial government'.[43] Nevertheless the acceptance of this principle of community ownership of land had profound and far-reaching consequences.

First, insofar as colonial rule accepted that indigenous customary law was to remain in force and be enforced—for native subjects—then it came to accept the codifications of that law produced by lawyers such as Mensah-Sarbah, Casely-Hayford, or Danquah, legal judgements in Court and, later, the work of anthropologists such as Rattray.[44] Hence it came to be accepted, as an unshakeable legal—and sociological—fact, that there was no such thing as absolute individual ownership in customary law; the land belonged to the community, meaning the dead, living and yet to be born. The irresoluble ambiguity in this doctrine was—*which* community? Whilst it was recognized that stools, families and even individuals could separately hold land, the question of whether a particular stool or family held the reversionary or communal right depended on vexed questions of historical precedent and jurisdictional claims.

Most important, the doctrine was quickly turned by the paramount chiefs, the heads of pre-colonial political entities recognized by the government, into a claim that the land of the *whole state* was vested in the paramount stool, all other rights being usufructory—including those of subordinate stools. This was the root of the infamous Asamankese dispute in Akyem Abuakwa, which lasted from around 1902, when the Okyeman Council issued a law prohibiting alienation of land in the state without the consent of the Okyenhene, to 1934.[45] In Ashanti, too, the powerful *amanhene* pressed similar claims to absolute or reversionary rights against both subordinate stools and, of course, against the weakened Kumasi chiefs until 1935.[46] The work of Rattray in particular was crucial in showing that the customary land tenure system was similar throughout the Akan territories of both Colony and Ashanti. He also linked it to an

42. See J. E. Casely Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (London, 1903); *The Truth about the West African Land Question* (London, 1913); J. Mensah Sarbah, *Fanti National Constitution* (London, 1906), and the extended discussion by A. N. Allott in 'Akan Law of Property', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1953, pp. 60, 83 and 287.
43. R. Luckham, 'Imperialism, law and structural dependence', *Development and Change* **9,** 2 (1978), p. 238; cf. J. Forbes Munro 'Monopolists and speculators: British investment in West African rubber, 1905–14', *Journal of African History* **22,** (1981), p. 272.
44. Rattray, *Ashanti Law*; J. B. Danquah, *Akan Laws and Customs* (London, 1928); the impact of Rattray's work is discussed in Kimble, *op. cit.*, p. 486.
45. R. Addo-Fening in P. Jenkins (ed.), *Akyem Abuakwa and the Politics of the Inter War Period in Ghana: Basel Africa Bibliography no. 12* (Basel, 1975), p. 66.
46. Allott, *op. cit.*, p. 313; Tordoff, *Ashanti*, p. 309.

understanding of the matrilineal family structure, to the laws of succession and inheritance, and to indigenous religion. In short, such a powerful array of legal, political and intellectual arguments surrounded the topic of customary land tenure by the end of the 1920s that it is small wonder that the government itself began to take them seriously; this was a consequence which was to be embodied in the Indirect Rule system.

In pursuit of both political legitimation and of a strategy of local government, the doctrine of Indirect Rule emerged in the late 1920s, as has been indicated, as a form of romantic cultural conservationism. African institutions were to be preserved but also encouraged to develop along progressive lines. In the Colony, however, the chiefs consistently resisted all attempts at reform legislation which (a) attempted to make chieftaincy a legal status conferrable only by the government, albeit that the government wanted only to support customary procedures for selection and enstoolment; (b) attempted to enforce procedures for accounting for revenues, particularly land revenues, through Native Treasuries, and (c) attempted to establish administrative supervision of Native Court procedures, income and membership.[47] Although the 1927 *Native Jurisdiction Ordinance* was welcomed by Nana Ofori Atta and the JPC chiefs—partly because it bolstered the position of the JPC and Paramount Stool in Akyem Abuakwa—it did not establish Treasuries or supervision of Tribunals.[48] It was not until 1939 that government took the power to compel NAs to establish a Treasury, and it was 1944 before a complete package of reforms was introduced (see above).[49] In Ashanti and the NTs reforms came earlier, 1935 and 1932, but in Ashanti, as in Colony, the British were most concerned with 'the disinclination of Divisional chiefs to agree that monies received from the sale or lease of communal lands or similar sources should be brought to account in the Native Treasury. . .'.[50]

Nevertheless, in spite of the tardiness of the legislation, it may be argued that British persistence on these matters had a very important outcome. By the time of the 1927 NJO, the British had come to interpret community ownership of land as meaning that the Stool particularly the Paramount Stool should be viewed as a public corporate body, holding community resources in trust, as it were, and quite distinct from the 'private' interests of families or individuals. The British were also willing to uphold the 'customary' laws of tenure and succession in the local courts and if necessary in the Supreme Court, and hence consistently resisted what they regarded as the self-interested and hypocritical attempts of lawyers to bring themselves—and English legal concepts—into the customary Courts

47. See Hailey, *Native Administration*, p. 226.
48. Addo-Fening, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–8.
49. Hailey, *Native Administration*, p. 204.
50. Hailey, *op. cit.*, Part IV, p. 30.

through amalgamation into the Supreme Court system. The British attitude was influenced in particular by what they regarded as the mischievous activities of lawyers in the Asamankese case.[51] This, together with British insistence on upholding 'customary law and practice', both in the courts through the exclusion of lawyers and politically in stool disputes, meant that the chiefs were caught in traps partly of their own making.

As their former allies, the educated politicians and lawyers began to criticize the Indirect Rule system in the 1930s, the chiefs had to accept the close cooperation offered by the British, particularly when the British seemed ready to bolster up the claims of the Paramount Stools (no doubt in the interest of more rational local government units). But the price of acceptance was a more rigid British insistence on the principles of customary law which the chiefs had thrown at them since 1900. Thus, while the chiefs were incorporated into the colonial state as a political status group, agents of a governmental system which wanted to portray itself as *legitimate* to the rural dwellers, their attempts to convert themselves into a landlord group, waxing rich from a state-supported system of rent extraction, were deliberately excluded from the bargain.[52] Instead, in its paternalistic way, the colonial government was acutely sensitive to its duties as protector of the innocent peasantry from the evils of landlordism and moneylenders; as elsewhere, the Indian experience fed into the African Empire. After the re-creation of the Ashanti Confederacy in 1935, the Ashanti administration was horrified at the attempts of the Kumasi clan chiefs to reimpose their authority in the Ahafo area, particularly through the extraction of 'cocoa tribute', and tried to stop it. Two rules were enunciated: (i) Kumasi citizens and local inhabitants should not pay tribute; (ii) money collected should be treated as public money, to be accounted for either by the ACC or the NA in its local governmental expenditure.[53] Hailey recorded the fears of the Gold Coast administration when he wrote that: 'Whereas a move to individual land tenure might please the agricultural expert, the administration must have regard to its other implications. In an agricultural community there is no greater source of unrest than a system of tenure which may subject the peasantry to exploitation by a landlord or moneylender.'[54] He also pointed out the damaging effects of cocoa commercialization 'which led some chiefs to seek independence from their Councillors and Elders by increasing their personal incomes through the sale or leasing of unoccupied lands'.[55] Clearly, as a glance at any of the

51. See B. M. Edsman, *Lawyers in Gold Coast Politics* (Uppsala, 1979), pp. 36, 48 and 143.
52. cf. Kay's view that the colonial state was weak and cautious and relied on at least passive popular acceptance: Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 9, and A. B. Holmes in P. Jenkins, *Akyem Abuakwa*, p. 21; 'Government [in the 1930s] was both paternalistic and cautiously accommodating'.
53. Dunn and Robertson, *Dependence*, p. 53.
54. Hailey, *Native Administration*, Part IV, p. 57.
55. Hailey, *op. cit.*, Part III, p. 199.

local studies of colonial administration shows, the government's attempts to stop the chiefs pocketing Stool Land revenues were never wholly effective. Nevertheless, it may be argued that they did prevent the consolidation of the chieftaincy as a landlord class incorporated into the state, with its interests articulated within the state and its property laws enforced. The laws which *were* enforced served only to *hinder* the growth of large-scale landed property, although of course big farmers did emerge. It was also very difficult, however, for a chiefly family to convert the resources of the colonially-recognized Stool into hereditary landed property because of another facet of customary law, namely the large number of shifting matrilineal segments from which the chief might be drawn.[56] (The degree to which matrilineal family property really was communal can also be exaggerated; the Asantehene's dynasty was perhaps one of the exceptions.)[57]

A further consequence of the preservation and development of customary law under colonial rule may be seen in the pattern of class formation in agrarian society, particularly in the relation between these classes and the state. Here I differ from Luckham who argues that the 'superstructure' of customary law did not affect the development of capitalist relations in commercial agriculture, e.g. the consolidation of individual property and the emergence of land as a commodity.[58] Undoubtedly the commercialization of agriculture produced certain forms of accumulation; but in southern Ghana we have an instance of the effects of the introduction of a commercial crop which was primarily an export commodity dependent on world markets. This meant that not only did agro-commercial small towns grow up, foci of that typical interpenetration of rich peasant money with trading, transport and property, but also that agricultural producers became peculiarly enmeshed with those who *marketed* the crop—brokers, buyers, and moneylenders.[59] Studies of these kinds of agricultural economies, e.g., West Canada, or the populists of America, show the emergence of similar kinds of political mobilization against the buying interests, the 'banks' or 'middlemen'.[60] But in two respects, I would

56. See M. Fortes in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde (eds), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London, 1950), p. 257; I. Wilks in D. Forde and P. M. Kaberry (eds), *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1967), p. 214.
57. R. Crook, 'Colonial rule and political culture in modern Ashanti', *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* **11**, 1, (1973), p. 7.
58. Luckham, *op. cit.*
59. See B. Beckman, *Organising the Farmers: Cocoa Politics and National Development in Ghana* (Uppsala, 1976), pp. 37–38, and p. 46: '[The Nowell Report of 1938] implies that perhaps as much as every tenth farmer may have been engaged in cocoa trading'.
60. cf. S. M. Lipset *Agrarian Socialism* (Berkeley, 1967), p. 71; J. D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis, 1931), p. 76. A vague concept of 'populism' has frequently been advanced as a common feature of these movements; in my view, however, the crucial variable is involvement in a cash-crop, export economy.

argue, the Gold Coast was different; land never became a class issue, and an agrarian interest was never properly formulated and represented at the level of the state. Why was this?

Various arguments have been advanced; Hopkins, for instance, sees the lack of a fully-fledged landlordism as connected to the scattered pattern of landholding, the lack of a competitive market in land and the extensive use of family and share cropper labour.[61] The conditions of access to land are emphasized by many others, including Hill, who emphasizes in addition the reciprocal or non-antagonistic character of relations between 'rich' and 'poor' farmers involved in the networks of rural debt. This she attributes to the peculiar importance of 'finance' rather than access to land as such in the growth of the cocoa industry.[62] I would rather point to the fact that such landlordism as did exist was never properly consolidated either at the legal or political level. Just as the colonial government never completely prevented chiefs appropriating Stool land revenues, so chiefs' levies themselves were more often avoided than paid—and the colonial state by the 1930s was not in the business of helping such enforcement. Thus any grievances which the cocoa farmer had about debts, foreclosures or availability of land were focussed on moneylenders and brokers, and land itself was not *tied* to any set of feudal or rigid tenant relations; grievances were not therefore against the land-owning gentry backed up by the state. Similarly, insofar as the chiefs particularly during the JPC era were the nearest the Gold Coast ever got to the representation of an agrarian interest, and are often viewed as representing in particular the interests of large farmers, they did not behave like a 'gentry'. As investors in produce buying and transport, property and education, the chiefs articulated more the general grievances of export farmers against the buyers—the foreign companies—and, for themselves, those of indigenous agro-commerce.[63] Thus, the conditions of land ownership did not become a class issue because of the peculiar position of the state in relation to property; and neither did land owners themselves (in the modern sense)—i.e. farmers, rich or poor—represent themselves as such at the political level. It was only when the state became associated with the marketing system that

61. A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London, 1973), pp. 239 and 233; cf. J. Saul, 'African peasants and revolution', *Review of African Political Economy*, **1,** (1974) p. 49.
62. P. Hill *Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 183 and 186; *Studies in Rural Capitalism in West Africa* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 25; cf. K. Post, 'Peasantization and rural political movements in West Africa', *European Journal of Sociology* **13,** 3, (1972), p. 251; G. Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania* (London, 1980), pp. 10 and 17; F. R. Bray, *Cocoa Development in Ahafo, West Ashanti* (Achimota, 1959, mimeo), pp. 51–2; J. Tosh, 'The cash-crop revolution in tropical Africa: an agricultural reappraisal', *African Affairs* **79,** 314(1980), pp. 91–2.
63. Crook, 'Ashanti', pp. 18–9; Dunn and Robertson, *Dependence*, p. 82; Bray *op. cit.*, pp. 36–7.

farmers could be mobilized against the *state*—as in the cocoa hold-ups—by those who represented a commercial interest.[64]

Indirect Rule and the Crisis of the 1940s

Now our initial question may be posed; what is the significance of these consequences of the preservation of customary law for our understanding of the relation between the reform of Indirect Rule and decolonization?

At the very time when Indirect Rule was being introduced formally into the administrative system, there was an increasing gap between ideology and reality both in terms of political practice and socio-economic relations. Not only were the chiefs resisting the administration's best-intentioned endeavours to uphold customary law and practice, and to regularize the basis of NA finances; the chiefs were also failing to deliver on the central core of the bargain. They were supposed to represent legitimate rule, guarantors of the acceptability of colonial rule. But the cocoa hold-ups, particularly of 1937–8, revealed the critical ambivalence of the chiefs' position. Recent work on the cocoa hold-ups reveals the extent to which the chiefs right down from Nana Ofori-Atta to the village levels in Eastern Province and Ashanti were involved in the formal organization and enforcement of the hold-ups.[65] In Central Province, Stone has noted the greater caution of the chiefs produced by the vigorous action of DCs in actually prosecuting chiefs who helped enforce the hold-ups.[66] Whatever the commercial ambitions of the chiefs and their merchant friends, Miles argues forcefully that they did have the support of the farmers generally, and in that sense represented a dangerous form of mass mobilization. In the past, both the neo-traditional elite and the educated reformers to be found in the Gold Coast Youth Conference had kept their distance from 'radical' agitational groups such as Wallace-Johnson's West African Youth League; the mere thought of the elite–mass alliances suggested by the events of the cocoa hold-up must have sent far greater shockwaves through

64. cf. Lonsdale, *State and Peasantry*, p. 113; 'the state took into itself the contradictions within peasant economy, the contradictions between peasants and settlers, the contradictions between producers and trading houses'. See also Lonsdale, 'States and Social Processes', p. 193.

65. R. Howard, 'Differential class participation in the Ghana cocoa boycott, 1937–8', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, **10**, 3 (1976); J. Miles, 'Cocoa marketing in the Gold Coast, 1919–39, with special reference to the hold-up movements', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of London, 1978; J. E. Milburn, *British Business and Ghanaian Independence* (London, 1977); S. Rhodie, 'The Gold Coast Cocoa Hold-up of 1930–31', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* **9**, 1968. See also Tordoff, *op. cit.*, p. 273, and Kimble *op. cit.*, pp. 50–1, for the 1921 and 1930 hold-ups; A. B. Holmes and P. Jenkins (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 26.

66. R. Stone, 'Colonial administration and rural politics in South-Central Ghana, 1919–51', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1974, p. 133; cf. Hailey's cryptic comment on the need for reform of the NA police: 'As the "cocoa hold-up" of 1937 showed, they are liable to be used for objects other than the maintenance of law and order or the purposes laid down in the NA Ordinance' (*Native Administration*, p. 210).

the administration than any of the ineffectual campaigns of the WAYL during the 1930s.

The paradox of Indirect Rule is that many officers in the colonial service had always known, or felt, the hollowness at the centre of the policy. One can always find quotations in the archives illustrating the despair and even cynicism of DCs faced with the task of implementing Indirect Rule in the face of the daily realities of their knowledge of the local chiefs.[67] But it was in the 1930s, with the contradiction between the administration's interpretation of how NAs should collect and use land revenue and the chiefs' landlordish ambitions, that the doubts really began to emerge—although never at the top level. Stone has noted the progress of these feelings in Central Province, and in Colony generally; in 1938 for instance the JPC petitioned the King that the colonial government was not listening to their advice, and the SNA and other senior officials began to distrust even Ofori Atta, because of his opposition to the establishment of Native Treasuries, as well as his role in the hold-ups.[68] The lack of progress in the 1940s meant that the 1944 Ordinance was regarded by at least the CP administration as a last chance—a reform accepted by the chiefs perhaps because they too felt the pressures from other quarters. But, as Stone notes, 'By 1944 the government was evidently unwilling to seek the assistance of the chiefs of the CP in either the planning or implementation of local development'.[69] Feelings of disillusion with official policy on the chiefs were compounded during the Second World War by other problems of staff shortage, low pay, lack of leave and lack of promotion prospects; by 1945 the government had experienced the unprecedented—a petition of junior administrative officers (38 out of 90 signed) complaining particularly about lack of communication between senior and junior officers.[70]

It is in this context of low morale, and a simmering disillusion with official policy on Indirect Rule, that the post-war crises of the swollen-shoot disease and the boycott must be understood. At the very moment when elements in the administration were beginning to wonder whether even the 1944 reforms would work, and when the chiefs themselves were losing faith in the government, the chiefs were faced with a new set of challenges to their loyalty. Should they side with their people or support the government? The importance of the swollen-shoot disease is difficult to exaggerate insofar as it led to the government's cutting-out campaign which decimated the cocoa industry in Eastern Province and aroused the countryside to a state of near-insurrection over both the methods used

67. Crook, 'Ashanti', p. 18; Dunn and Robertson, *Dependence*, p. 169; Staniland, *op. cit.*, pp. 104–16; Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
68. Stone *op. cit.*, p. 167.
69. *ibid.*, p. 165.
70. *ibid.*, p. 194; cf. Pearce, *Turning Point*, p. 70.

and the lack of a compensation programme. Both the JPC and the ACC argued that cutting-out should be voluntary, that notice should be given and compensation paid.[71] The government then twisted the arm of the Asantehene and got the ACC to issue an order supporting compulsory cutting-out in Ashanti—where the disease was not too bad.[72] The reaction against the chiefs was, nevertheless, fierce and in 1948 the ACC memorandum of evidence to the Watson Commission argued that the Agricultural Department's policy of cutting-out was *mistaken*, and complained bitterly of the historic failure of the colonial government ever to give proper help to the cocoa farmers.[73]

By early 1948 the rise of the campaign to boycott expatriate and Syrian firms' 'high priced' imports, organized by Nii Bonne in Accra, made the government fear a repeat of 1938. There is clear evidence that chiefs throughout Ashanti and Colony, frightened by the upheavals caused by swollen-shoot, sided with the boycott and helped enforce it with all the resources of the NAs.[74] Dennis Austin's later reflections on this period hint that the ACC's displeasure with Krobo Edusei *after* the riots had less to do with the government's hardline, than with Edusei's attempt to use the boycott to run a protection racket.[75] The Boycott Committees in southern Ghana clearly attracted groups of local African small traders—of whom Edusei was a typical example—with a grievance against foreign, particularly Syrian business, as well as those who saw the financial potential in the enforcement of such a ban on other traders. Enforcement had only become socially possible, however, because of the involvement of the chiefs and the local 'small town' elites of big farmers, brokers, schoolteachers and company clerks so accurately described in Austin's accounts of the Improvement or Youth Associations of the 1940s.[76] The local studies which followed on Austin's and Apter's work have shown that it is virtually impossible to distinguish, at least in class terms, between chiefs, local elites and so-called 'nationalists', that is, those who supported or who claim to have supported the UGCC and then its CPP faction before 1951.[77] They were one and the same; as argued above, the structure of southern Ghanaian commercial agricultural society was such that those who represented cocoa farmers' resistance to the cutting-out campaign were

71. Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, pp. 59–66.
72. See *Interim Report of the Committee of Enquiry to Review Legislation for the Treatment of Swollen Disease of Cocoa* (Beeton), Appendix VI (Gold Coast Sessional Papers, 1, 1948).
73. *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbance in the Gold Coast* (Watson) (Great Britain, 1948, C.O. 231)—see 'Resolution of the Ashanti Confederacy Council in connection with the recent disturbances'—memo of evidence submitted to Commission of Enquiry.
74. *Watson Report* para 170; Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
75. cf. D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, pp. 78–9, and *Ghana Observed* (Manchester, 1976), p. 180.
76. Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, pp. 92–102 and *Ghana Observed*, passim.
77. See next page.

also those who demanded—and had demanded since the 1930s—a marketing system not dominated by a monopsony whether private or public. Such a demand had always been linked with the attack on expatriate monopoly control of the import trade, and with the allegation that this control kept prices high. There was thus a coincidence of general and particular interests; the popular demands for a better deal for all producers (on price and marketing), the resistance to cutting out and for lower prices to urban (and rural) consumers coincided with the 'agro-commercial' (as opposed to 'agrarian landlord') interests of African traders, produce brokers and large cocoa farmers. In this movement, it was the Ghana Farmers Congress, the chiefs and local Youth Associations (which often overlapped with the Boycott Committees), the trade unions in Accra and Takoradi, and ultimately the urban mobs who were the real instigators of the urban and rural upheavals which so shocked colonial and metropolitan opinion in 1948.[78]

The argument as to whether or not it was 'nationalism' which, in the aftermath of 1948, 'forced' colonial reform in the direction of decolonization is, therefore, something of a straw man. Clearly the UGCC, which can be taken to embody nationalist organization between 1947 and 1949, gained a retrospective credibility from the arrest of its leaders after the 1948 riots; but, as Austin originally acknowledged, it was an infamy which they did not deserve. In spite of the Watson Commission's Communist scare stories, the UGCC had had little or nothing to do with the farmers' movement and the boycott committees or with the ensuing riots. It is true that it claimed the support of Youth Associations and other groups across the country, but in the absence of electoral politics the concept of 'support for the UGCC' in 1947–8 was decidedly abstract and tenuous. Neither is it necessary to accept the CPP version of history, put about later by Nkrumah

77. See Dunn and Robertson, *Dependence*, p. 317; M. Owusu, *Uses and Abuses of Political Power* (Chicago and London, 1970), pp. 172–91; Crook, *op. cit.* (1978); Stone, *op. cit.*, A Cawson, 'Local Politics and Indirect Rule in Cape Coast 1928–57', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford 1975; J. Simensen, 'Commoners, Chiefs and Colonial Government; British Policy and Land Politics in Akim Abuakwa', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Trondheim, 1975; D. Brown, 'Politics in the Kpandu Area of Ghana', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1977. (In the Northern Territories the elite character of local politics, as it emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was even more strongly marked; see Staniland, *op. cit.*, p. 137; P. A. Ladouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians: the Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana* (London, 1979), pp. 83–5.) In some cases, particularly in Akim Abuakwa, the CPP was associated from a very early date with groups in opposition to the NA chiefly establishment; but such opposition was predominantly factional or communal in character rather than 'class' based. As argued above, there was little basis for a class-type hostility to chiefs or big farmers *qua* landlords, although the system of marketing could clearly lead to assymetric relations between 'money lender' farmers and debtors. But there is no evidence that the CPP ever mobilized or represented *that* kind of grievance; the nearest it ever came to it was the use of the CPP-sponsored Cocoa Purchasing Company to give out loans to small farmers (or even non-farmers) in the mid-1950s—see Crook *op. cit.* (1978), p. 129. In Akim, of course, the big migrant farmers were initially in the anti-Ofori-Atta camp.
78. Beckman, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–5.

and indeed any CPP activist one cares to interview, which attributes the mass protests to the influence of the CPP's linear precursors—radically minded 'youth' who were '*later to become* CPP cadres'. Whilst it may be true that many of those who emerged as CPP leaders both at local and national level after 1951 had participated in the 1947–50 events, it is anachronistic to explain the class character or political motivation of the earlier events by reference to the character of the CPP as it was after taking office in 1951. In this respect the debate over the origins and social character of the nationalist party is of little help.

One cannot approach the events of 1947–50 armed with one's explanation of what nationalism was 'really' about without also making the assumption that these events were proto-nationalist, that is, that the social movements were led and the issues were set by those who later crystallized into the radical nationalist party, the CPP. Whilst Rathbone has convincingly laid to rest the idea that the CPP can be understood as an expression of the interests of either an educationally defined group or of that catch-all pseudo-class, the 'petty bourgeoisie', is it any more convincing to apply the concept of an 'aspirant small business' interest to the events of 1948?[79] The small businessmen described by Rathbone as the core element of the CPP were undoubtedly to be found on the Boycott Committees and the Youth Associations of the 1940s; but insofar as such individuals did participate in these groups they were less 'aspirants' than members of the local elites formed by the commercialized agrarian society of southern Ghana. The leading elements in these elites were the chiefs and big farmers, together with the local establishment of educated employees of mercantile companies, teachers, produce brokers and traders who usually formed the core of the slightly incongruously named Youth Associations. As argued above, such groups whatever criticisms they may have had, as 'educated' men, of the Indirect Rule system, were firmly tied in with the elite network of agro-commercial interests so powerfully represented by the chieftaincy. The issues with which they were engaged in 1947–48 have already been described and it is difficult to discern or differentiate, at that time, within

79. See R. J. A. R. Rathbone, 'Businessmen in Politics: Party Struggle in Ghana, 1949–57', *Journal of Development Studies* **9**, 3, 1974, and 'Parties' Socio-Economic Bases and Regional Differentiation in the Rate of Change in Ghana', in P. Lyon and J. Manor (eds), *Transfer and Transformation: Political Institutions in the New Commonwealth* (Leicester, 1983), pp. 143–5. Rathbone's concern is, of course, with the nature of the party itself and the degree to which its radicalism can be explained by differences in its social character from the UGCC on the one hand and the Ashanti-based National Liberation Movement of the 1950s, on the other. He does not attempt to interpret the whole range of social discontent involved in the 1948 crisis through the prism of the CPP's precursors. He does claim, nevertheless, that CPP radicalism, derived from these interests, was what mobilized and gave force to the coalition of southern-based social groups brought under the banner of nationalist or anti-colonial protest in the lead-up to 1951. What is being argued below is that, even if the CPP was formed by aspirant small businessmen, the radicalism of the anti-colonial protest 1948–51 did not derive its force or relevance from the interests of such a group.

the dominant themes of the grievances against expatriate and Lebanese business, the urban price issue and the incipient farmers' revolt, a sub-theme representing the hard-edged grudge of 'aspirant' businessmen *against* these local African elites. Only in Accra, perhaps, as a result of the expansion and boom conditions created by the war-time military operations, was there a sufficiently large urban white collar and commercial lower-middle class which was not tied in to the chiefly agro-commercial elites, and was therefore more independently vociferous on the typically 'nationalist' themes of Africanization and political reform. But the UGCC still at this time adequately articulated their economic grievances, although the Boycott Committee had brought in the street-traders. Only by recognizing the dominance of groups and interests other than those which may have characterized the CPP at a later date can one comprehend the evidence that the CPP—seen as a radical faction of the nationalist movement—was *supported* by many chiefs, rich farmers, local elite youth associations and the farmers' movement, as well as the urban workers, up until 1951. More accurately, the CPP supported these groups, and echoed the issues which they defined as important. The evidence simply cannot support a view of the CPP as simultaneously a broad-based aggregator of the range of demands described, and as 'really' being about the interests of aspirant businessmen with a grudge either against the local establishment or against the 'merchant princes' of the UGCC. The solution to the puzzle is very simple; after 1951, the CPP *did* become a party with distinctive, and narrower, interests—which is why it turned against the chiefs, the cocoa farmers and the trade unions who had set in motion the events which had so frightened the colonial government, and which in turn had enabled the CPP to appear as an answer to the crisis so caused.[80]

The government in 1948 therefore faced what appeared to be a united opposition of farmers, urban dwellers and chiefs; the chiefs, at the moment of test, had failed to provide what had been the core rationale of Indirect Rule: effective political leadership which kept the population loyal to the government. As is well known, the riots and the arrest of leading nationalists eventually frightened the chiefs back into more or less supporting the government. But the damage had been done. The crisis, and the government's response to it, had not been caused by nationalism, as such. But neither was it the product of a Whitehall plan. The initial response of the government was to hope that continuation of the reform of the NAs would work, and it was only the revealed unreliability and lack of cooperation of the chieftaincy which set them looking for alternatives.

The crisis of the colonial state between 1948 and 1951 was, then, very

80. After 1951 the CPP emerged as clearly associated with a modernizing, statist, and hence centralizing, ideology which brought it into conflict with chiefs, farmers and unions.

much a crisis of political institutions, a crisis which emphasized above all the 'externality' of the colonial state—its lack of dependence on and hence lack of deep support in the 'conditions of existence' of local society.[81] A 'revolutionary' opportunity was presented when social and economic unrest appeared at that moment to be dangerously out of control;[82] the administration itself was weak and divided, with low morale and extensive disillusion with policy;[83] its main and supposedly solid political support group in colonial society had been giving cause for concern since at least the hold-up of 1937–8, and had now shown itself to be a broken reed in the far more dangerous swollen-shoot and boycott affairs. The development of the economy under war-time controls had also made clear the role of the state in collecting the surplus of the cocoa economy and the chiefs themselves were more willing than ever to distance themselves from this state, following on the demands of Ashie Nikoi and other farmers' leaders for producers' control over the marketing of cocoa.[84] There was, therefore, a drawing apart of government and society which revealed to the chiefs (amongst other things) the extent to which they were, in effect, dispensable; if they had no political role to play, what was to stop them siding with the farmers in pursuit of their private economic interests? They did not need the state for that; on the contrary, the state now appeared as antagonist. It had never accepted their aspirations to become landlords, but instead had tried to force NA Treasuries on them. For its part, the colonial state was also forced by this open confrontation to see that what was *important* was to maintain its control over the cocoa economy; and *it* didn't need the chiefs for that.[85]

One of the most interesting revelations of the revisionist literature on decolonization, however, concerns the extent to which the highest official circles covered up the extent of the criticism of chiefs presented in the evidence to the Watson Commission, and to the Coussey Committee of 1949. Whilst both Committees received numerous attacks on Indirect Rule from junior staff, both the Gold Coast government in its official statement, the British Government in its 1948 White Paper on the Watson Commission, and Lord Hailey in his published work rejected—as late as 1951—any idea that the NAs were finished.[86] As the Chief Commissioner of the Colony, T. O. Mangin, wrote: 'Such untold damage can be done by

81. cf. Hyden, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
82. cf. T. Skocpol *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 29 and 'What makes peasants revolutionary?' *Comparative Politics* **14,** 3, (1982), p. 373.
83. See R. J. A. R. Rathbone 'The Government of the Gold Coast after the 2nd World War', *African Affairs,* **67,** 268, 1968, where it is argued that the interregnum between Burns's departure in June 1947 and Arden-Clarke's arrival in August 1949 was crucial.
84. See Beckman, *op. cit.*, pp. 42 and 57–8.
85. cf. Lonsdale, 'States and Social Processes', pp. 192–3 on the new need to administer markets, and 'State and Peasantry', p. 107, on the state's fear of the cocoa farmers.
86. Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 194 and 204.

enthusiastic officers trying to obtain quick results in native administration. Satisfactory results will only be obtained long after we have disappeared.'[87] Burns, the 'reforming' Governor who had secured an unofficial majority for Africans on the Legislative Council, continued to believe that this was no more than a price to be paid for greater central control of reformed NAs, a control necessary for the NAs to be turned into more effective agencies of social and economic development.[88] Not only did the 1951–1954 Constitution offer the chiefs a continuing role, but even the local government and local court reforms of 1952–8 did not bring about the destruction of chiefly power which might have been contemplated either in Whitehall or nationalist circles. The significance of a continuing official refusal to accept that Indirect Rule was finished is undeniable, for it underlay the continuing double-think in Gold Coast policy referred to earlier. In 1951, when power was actually being handed over to the CPP, the policy of reforming the NAs was still extant; the presence of the CPP government merely accelerated the implementation of the Coussey Commission's proposals for a new local government system in which the chiefs would continue to have a role. Was it a case of Whitehall dragging a reluctant colonial government into the decolonization era? In fact, it is easier to reconcile the caution of the Gold Coast government at certain points with the view from Whitehall than might be thought; the core of the contradiction is best explained as a local phenomenon. As argued above, the official caution of the Colonial Office is less surprising once the Cohen–Caine plans are placed in their 1940s context of reform of local government—the foundation for 'training in self-government'—rather than seen as components of a radical plan for decolonization. In 1947–8 it was agreed that the chiefs needed to be 'retained but democratized', not done away with.[89] The British Government's response to the Watson Commission 'closely reflected the views of the [Colonial] Office', according to Morgan.[90] But in the Gold Coast itself, the debate was already more polarized. 'Diehard' officers such as Mangin and Scott, the Colonial Secretary, played a key role during the crucial period 1947–9, when for many months (13 altogether) there was no Governor and, in between, a weak Governor, Creasy, whose appointment did not long survive the 1948 riots.[91] They continued to believe in the chiefs as viable representatives of an 'old order' and were perhaps ideologically incapable of seeing the very real links which

87. *ibid.*, p. 185.
88. cf. Hargreaves in Gifford and Louis, *Transfer of Power*,. pp. 124–8; see also A. Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant* (London, 1949), pp. 200–4.
89. Pearce, *Turning Point*, p. 153.
90. Morgan, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 14.
91. D. Rooney, *Sir Charles Arden-Clarke* (London, 1982), pp. 87–8; Rathbone, 'Government of the Gold Coast'.

existed between the chiefs, local elites, Youth Associations (and by extension the so-called 'educated' politicians) and the farmers' movement. It was their views which must have shaped the response of the Gold Coast government itself to the events of 1948. Arden-Clarke, on the contrary, once having established control of the government machine and removed some of the old guard, saw that winning back the chiefs from their flirtation with sedition was no longer a sufficient condition for progress. His initial aim was to incorporate the much broader elements involved in the post-war upheavals, whilst isolating what was then thought of as the hooligan element in the CPP; in this he was not significantly out of tune with Colonial Office policy, shorn of its utopian elements. The new Governor played a determining role, then, in liberating that climate of opinion in the Gold Coast which had already recognized the ultimate logic of the chiefs' weak and ambivalent position. The Colonial Office had a vague idea that the chiefs ought to be 'democratized'; they were thinking, in the old cliché, of 'bringing in the educated African'. On the ground it was more complex than that, as Arden-Clarke recognized, and it was this, perhaps, which accounted for his occasionally over-zealous determination after 1951 to make the world see that a CPP administration could work, and that it was the only feasible policy for the colony. Even then, he was opposed by elements in the Ashanti administration throughout the 1950s who still failed to see the significance of the *new* role which the chiefs had adopted as a consequence of throwing in their lot with popular anti-government forces.

Continuing ambivalence in Gold Coast policy towards the chiefs, particularly during 1947 to 1949, but continuing into the 1950s, had less to do with Whitehall reformism, therefore, than with a conflict in the administration dating back to the 1930s, a conflict deepened by the 1947–9 crises in both government–chief relationships and in the unstable direction of the administration itself. The ambivalence was highly significant in that it made the chiefs, at a crucial point, the victims of a 'false message' from the highest authorities. It was false because it represented the views of those in the administration whose days were numbered, and whose ideology was being undermined by the fudge which passed for a policy in the Colonial Office. Although the policy of 'democratizing the NAs' crumbled within a few years of attempts at its implementation, it was this, on top of the apparent stand of both Gold Coast and British governments which led the chiefs into their final trap. After 1948, they decided reluctantly to cooperate with the colonial government in order to head off the nationalists. It was an ambivalent kind of cooperation which at the local level was often contradicted by either support for or benevolent neutrality towards the nationalists. Too late they discovered that they were no longer needed—particularly when the nationalists achieved a successful dyarchy with the colonial government in the 1950s. Ironically enough, it was the die-hards'

view of the chiefs which the CPP government found to be a convenient political myth for attacking those social forces which opposed it in the 1950s.

Conclusions

The essentially cautious and fragile nature of the Gold Coast administration meant that, once faced with a united and mass-based opposition to the core of the state's economic basis—its control over the cocoa economy—it quickly accommodated to maintain that base. There is no need to discover an imperial plan for self-government in 1943 or even 1948 to explain this shift. The accommodation, initially intended to reform the chieftaincy, turned into an unceremonious ditching of the NA system after 1952. The change was concealed at the time with false appearances of continuity with the past, the rhetoric of the new partnership with educated Africans notwithstanding. Deeper study of this crisis of the colonial state, focussing on how and why such a rapid and seemingly self-destructive course could have been taken, has been the main task of this article. Why did the necessary accommodation to the challenge from the cocoa industry take the form that it did? All policy up to then had pointed in the direction of consolidation of and, if necessary, concessions to, the power of the Native Authority elites, viewed as they were as the genuine representatives of the farming communities. It has been argued, however, that the post-1951 reversals, which were critical in that they destroyed the existing power structures without fulfilling the aim of consolidating a new local elite committed to working with the British, are inexplicable unless rooted in a set of more long-standing and fundamental characteristics of state–society relationships.

The apparatus of Indirect Rule, both juridical and political, embodied an essentially romantic conception of the chieftaincy's role in the various societies of the Gold Coast. The continuing consolidation of this concept in formal institutions and legal processes, well into the 1940s, sustained the ideology of chiefs as 'communal trustees' at the same time as the enforcement of the law prevented the emergence of an agrarian interest led by a powerful land-owning rural bourgeoisie. Some of the weaknesses and contradictions in the chiefs' position had always been recognized by colonial officials, and the solution was, by the 1940s, thought to lie in making the chieftaincy a more fully integrated part of the state machinery. Such a development was bound to emphasize—and deepen—the chiefs', and hence the state's, lack of an organic connection with emerging socio-economic structures in the countryside. This was especially so when the mercantilist nature of the state had been reinforced rather than modified by the impact of war-time produce controls and the setting up of the Cocoa Marketing Board. The weakness of the chiefs was only fully revealed

when in the crises of the 1940s they appeared incapable of either leading or suppressing the various upheavals. If they had genuinely articulated an agrarian interest the colonial government would have had to have dealt with them; but in the eyes of the government they had merely revived an unholy alliance of brokers, moneylenders (the *bêtes noires* of all DCs) and local commercial interests riding on the backs of middle peasant grievances. In a rural economy dominated by export crops, the government saw itself as the best mediator of populist grievances vis-a-vis relationships with the world market. And with the CMB it felt that it had a powerful mechanism for simultaneously ensuring justice for the peasantry and meeting metropolitan needs. If the chiefs had cooperated earlier and more wholeheartedly with the state's political project they could have been used, as Hailey and other reformists intended, to outflank and suppress the urban nationalists' efforts to pose as the leaders of the rural malcontents. But here too, local realities had constantly undermined the formal and legal purposes of the NAs; resistance to both modern local government functions and the corporate conception of land responsibilities had made the NAs a byword for corruption and inefficiency in government circles. From the local point of view the NA chiefs remained powerful and (in Ashanti and EP), wealthy patrons, a neo-traditional elite, as they have been called;[92] but their abuses of governmental power and their economic roles vitiated their potential as popular leaders. The only weapon they did have was the ability to call on a reservoir of traditional loyalties and sentiments—a power used later to good effect in Ashanti in particular, when the chiefs threw in their lot with the agro-commercial interests they had supported in 1938 and 1948, but this time in an unambiguously anti-government mood.

Overall, however, it is not surprising that this set of relationships between the state and its seemingly indispensable collaborating elites in local society crumbled rapidly in the crises of 1945 to 1950. The challenges coming from both rural and urban groups did force an accommodation or, at least, an attempt to maintain the momentum of reform. It was the chiefs who failed the goals set up by those reforms. The nationalists—UGCC, and then CPP—did not cause either the upheavals or the failure of NA reforms. But they did benefit in 1951, insofar as colonial government came to see them as a 'solution'—a more amenable and perhaps more legitimate group than the chieftaincy. But because of their lack of a class basis in rural society, the nationalists became very quickly a co-opted group, reproducing the externality of the colonial state. To these structural weaknesses of the colonial state were added the messages from the Colonial Office reformers, and the situational weaknesses of the

92. Kilson in Gann and Duignan, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

period such as disunity and low morale within the administration. Thus in spite of the attempt to maintain a facade of continuity in the 1950s, the search for a new, more secure and more acceptable form of colonial rule was already on by the end of the 1940s. That it failed (insofar as early independence can be seen as 'not what was intended' in 1947) was, it may be argued, very largely a product of the unchanged 'externality' of the state from local society. The nationalists were very much the weak last—or unfinished?—act of the play, not the first. They inherited, with their 'statist' aspirations, this weak state with its potential for conflict with the rural economy yet to come; a state which had not succeeded in moving beyond a mercantilist form of taxation to a more organic relationship with the local economy, and which had left substantial 'unfinished business' in the crucial area of land law and tenure.[93] The imperial dimension as an explanatory factor only takes on its critical significance in the mid-1950s, with the economic failure of the 'new empire' and the rediscovery in the metropole of convenient political ideologies derived from the old Dominions' experiences.

93. As early as 1926 the Ormsby Gore report, whilst recognizing the political need to support the chieftaincy, had pointed out the fundamental confusions caused by the preservation of 'customary' land law, and recommended comprehensive reform in the shape of land courts, registration and legislation. In 1951, Hailey was still recommending the same measures. Nothing was ever done. See Kay *op. cit.*, pp. 212–4; Hailey *op. cit.* (1951) p. 223 and *Part IV*, p. 57.