

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES**



**A SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY OF GHANA'S BONSA TYRE COMPANY, 1963 TO
CONTEMPORARY TIMES.**

BY

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PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MPhil
AFRICAN STUDIES DEGREE**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that except for references to other people's work, which have been duly acknowledged, this work is the result of my research work done under supervision and has neither in part nor in whole been presented elsewhere for another degree.

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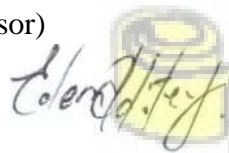


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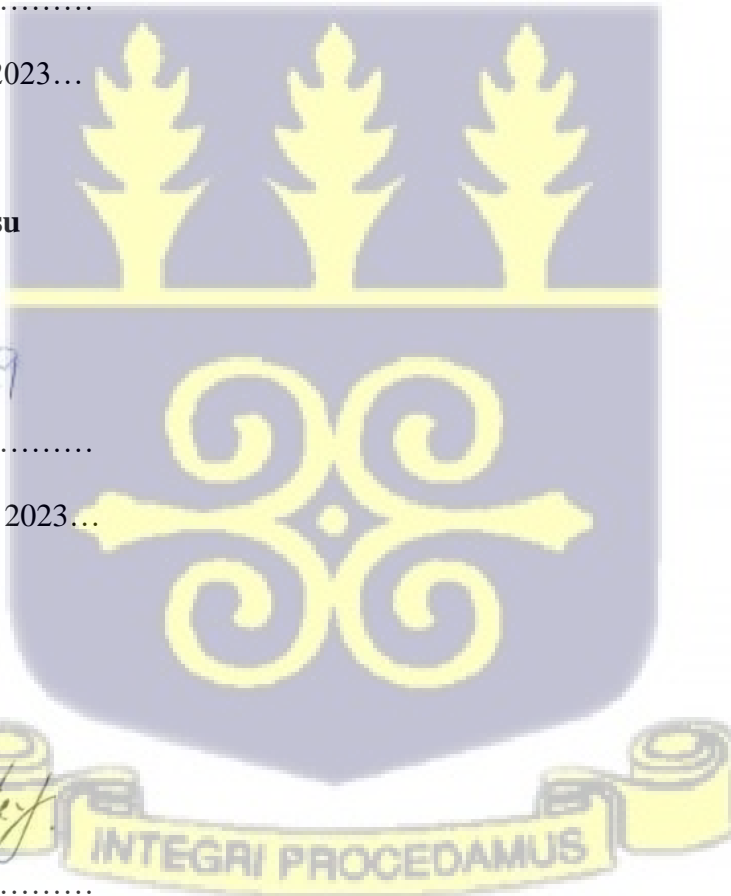
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ABSTRACT

The invention of the motor vehicle is one of the most amazing developments in human and mobility. By its design, tyres are critical to the mobility of a car. Motor vehicles were introduced to the Gold Coast during the early 1900s. They ushered in significant changes in the mobility of people and goods and in the provision of services in ways which had been previously unimagined. But while it became indispensable to social and economic development in the country, it came with several challenges, among which tyre shortage was crucial, particularly from the 1960s. This led to the manufacture of locally made tyres in Ghana as part of Ghana's industrialization efforts. This work examines the development of Ghana's first company, established to produce vehicle tyres locally. The establishment of the Bansa Tyre Company, although started in the 1960s, is a part of the complex developments in the history and developments of motor transport, rubber cultivation, and industrialisation in Ghana. Using information from archival sources, newspapers and oral interviews, this work argues that regardless of its wavering performance, the Bansa Tyre Company was not irrelevant; it was essential to Ghana's socio-economic development. It played a pivotal role in Ghana's transport history as a lifeline in sustaining Ghana's motor transport system at the depths of its challenges from 1969 until it collapsed in the 2000s. The company's manufacture and distribution of locally manufactured tires was a crucial remedy to Ghana's transportation challenges with tyre shortages until a substantial remedy was secured. Thus, Ghana's transport could not have succeeded without the Bansa Tyre Company. Again, it contributed to the economic and social progress of the Bansa community, but the collapse of the Bansa Tyre Company led to a severe socio-economic decline.

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Me da mo ase!

Aseda nka me NyankopOn ne Nananom !

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Industrialisation is a critical factor in any nation's socio-economic development and transformation. In the early years of independence, Ghana was cognisant of the significance of industrialization to its development. In 1959, the five-year development plan envisioned the establishment of about 600 factories as a way of ensuring economic diversification, reducing imports and providing employment for the masses.¹ In the 1960s, Ghana underwent a period of industrialization that aimed to diversify the economy, reduce imports and promote economic growth. One key area of focus during this time was the development of the country's agricultural resources for industrialization. This included harnessing rubber for local tyre manufacturing. During the 19th century, Ghana's rubber industry (then Gold Coast) played a significant role in contributing to the European rubber tyre industry. The invention of the pneumatic tyre for bicycles in Europe in the late 1880s led to a surge in demand and increased rubber prices. The demand further rose after 1900 with the application of pneumatic tyres in the automobile industry, leading to an expansion in car production and the need for more car tyres.²

Motor transport was introduced in the Gold Coast by early 1900 and became increasingly significant in the Gold Coast economy from the third decade of the 20th century yet the colonial

¹ "What the five-year scheme means to Ghana", Ghanaian Times, March 25, 1959.

² Pneumatic tyre was initially invented by R. W Thompson in 1845 in the United Kingdom for horse-drawn carriages and was not effective for motor vehicle. The idea was further developed for bicycles and patented by J.B Dunlop in 1888. The Michelin Brothers in France were the first to use pneumatic tyres on an automobile during the Paris-Bordeaux-Paris automobile race in 1895. The invention was therefore a great boost in the motor vehicle industry. It improved the riding comfort, it also significantly reduced the rolling resistance.

administration never embarked or promoted the establishment of tyre manufacturing using local rubber in the emergent tyre market which came with the motor transport industry in the Gold Coast. Motor transport in the Gold Coast relied on imported tyres, the services of local vulcanizers and the reuse of old tyres. Even this supply was under the dictates of changes within British rubber policies.

From the late 1950s, the Convention People's Party (CPP) government, which was led by Kwame Nkrumah took a keen interest in rubber cultivation to diversify the cash crop economy and boost its industrialisation agenda. Acutely aware of the country's overdependence on cocoa and imports, the CPP government made a substantial investment to develop other crops for export and industrialization. In 1957, the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC), together with a Danish firm, R. T. Briscoe, started a 5,000-acre rubber estate at Dixcove, and by 1961 about 2,140 acres were planted.³ Many other areas in Ghana around Central, Eastern, and Ashanti were also cultivated by the State Farm Corporation in 1963 and several efforts were made by the government to rally cooperatives in rubber production.

An integral part of Nkrumah's rubber production scheme was to construct a state-owned tyre factory with assistance from Czechoslovakia. In December 1961, officials from Ghana's Ministry of Industries met with Czech officials to discuss plans for the project. They agreed that the factory be built in Bonsaso, because of its proximity to the rubber-producing areas. The Bonsa Tyre Company Limited (hereafter BTC) was expected to start production by 1964.⁴ However, due to some unexpected delays, the commencement of its establishment began in 1963 and by 1966,

³ Marvin P. Miracle and Ann Seidman, *State farms in Ghana* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1968), 9.

⁴ Keri Lambert, "Tapping Ghanaians, 1957-66" (Paper, Yale University, 2016), 1-28. Specific references will be made to the Firestone Ghana Limited as and when it becomes relevant. This is to ensure consistency of name to prevent possible confusion.

the factory was about fifty per cent complete.⁵ The sudden overthrow of the Nkrumah government by the National Liberation Council (NLC) in 1966 would further stall the completion of the project.

Between 1966 and 1967, the NLC's National Economic Committee invited foreign companies to invest in state companies.⁶ The state companies that were opened up for private foreign investment included the Bonsa Tyre Company. The tyre company was subsequently taken over by the Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company to operate as a joint venture with the government of Ghana under a new name, Firestone Ghana Limited. The Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company owned sixty percent shares with the remaining forty percent shares owned by the government of Ghana. The company's commercial production began in 1969 reaching a peak production of 554,858 tyres in 1977.⁷ Barely two decades down the line, Firestone withdrew from the joint venture in 1980 and the company was renamed the Bonsa Tyre Company Limited with the government as the single shareholder by 1981.⁸

In 1986 the government of Ghana with assistance from the African Development Bank embarked on a rehabilitation project to revamp the Bonsa Tyre Company. The aim was to rehabilitate, refurbish and train technical staff to increase the production level of the company. The rehabilitation commenced in 1990 with Dunlop International Projects Limited as its technical partner.⁹ Nevertheless, by 1999, this objective was not met because the rehabilitation was not fully completed by the end of the project. Decades later, the factory became defunct and the government placed the company on divestiture.¹⁰

⁵African Development Bank, Project Completion Report Bonsa Rehabilitation Project (Ghana: 2000), 1.

⁶ Lambert, "Tapping Ghanaians", 23.

⁷ Stephen Adei, "Technological Capacity and Aborted Industrialization in Ghana: The Case of Bonsa Tyre Company", *World Development*, Vol.18 No.11. (1990): 1501-1511.

⁸ Agricultural Development Bank, Project Completion Report Bonsa Rehabilitation Project, 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Aklorbotu Dortsey, "Western Region's Bonsa Tyre Factory Defunct". Graphic Online, April 12, 2021. <https://www.graphic.comgh/news/general/western-region-s-bonsa-tyre-factory-defunct.html>

As noted earlier Ghana was aware of the potential of industries in the early days of its independence. Industries play a pivotal role in shaping a nation's socio-economic landscape and improving the well-being of its citizens. They serve as vital drivers of economic growth and development, generating employment, income, and prosperity for society. They contribute to reducing poverty, promoting social inclusion, and nurturing human capital. Yet the existing narrative on an industrial company the Bona Tyre Company paints an image of successive bouts of inefficiencies, exploitation and finally collapse. This narrative shows no direct importance of the rubber industry and its connection to Ghana's motor transport industry. Again, researchers' attention to the flaws of the Bona Tyre Company (BTC) has masked appreciation of how the Bona Tyre Company contributed to Ghana's socioeconomic growth, particularly the development of motor transport and the Bonsaso community.

What this research seeks to do is to trace the origin and evolution of the Bona Tyre Company within a historical framework from its inception, and its collapse to its current state, highlighting its significance to the development of Ghana's motor transport industry and the Bonsaso community. This is imperative on several grounds. First, understanding how the BTC contributed to the development of Ghana's motor transport industry allows for a more nuanced assessment of its economic significance. Again, investigating the BTC's impact on the Bonsaso community sheds light on the social and community development it fostered. Finally, we can achieve a varied understanding of the BTC's role in Ghana's History from the existing narrative. The period under review (1963 to contemporary time), marks the commencement of the establishment of the Bona Tyre Company and its eventual collapse and will enable this work to be situated in the extant national and community realities.

As a social-economic history, by focusing on the experiences of workers, motorists and the Bona community with the Bona Tyre company, this work moves beyond solely political and economic perspectives to provide a more nuanced understanding of the company's history and its impact on the surrounding community, the motor transport industry and actors in the industry. The experiences of workers, motorists and the Bona community help to shed light on the everyday implications of the company's presence, operations, and eventual closure. In this way, this work adds to the history of the Bona Tyre company and provides a more complete picture of its impact on the wider society.

The Research Problem

The problem addressed in this work is that the significance of the rubber industry and its connection to Ghana's transport history has been largely overlooked in scholarship. The focus of key scholars including Adei and Sawyerr on the deficiencies of the Bona Tyre Company (BTC) and its neo-colonial narrative, has obscured understanding of how the Bona Tyre Company's activities affected socio-economic development in Ghana particularly the development of motor transport and the Bona community. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the history of the Bona Tyre Company and its role in the development of Ghana's motor transport industry and the socio-economic development of the Bona community and thus establish a connection between Ghana's agro-industrial history, transport and community histories.

Research Objectives

The overarching objective of this study is to examine the socio-economic history of the Bona Tyre Company. The research focuses specifically on these objectives:

1. to traces the connection between the rubber industry and the establishment of the Bonsa Tyre Company.
2. to examines how the development of the Bonsa Tyre Company was significant to the development of Ghana's motor transport industry.
3. to examines the significance of the Bonsa Tyre Company to the Bonsaso Community.

Research Questions

In addressing the above objectives, I seek to answer these questions:

1. Under what circumstances did the Bonsa Tyre Company originate?
2. In what ways has the development of the Bonsa Tyre Company contributed to the development of Ghana's motor transport industry?
3. How was the Bonsa Tyre Company significant to the development of the Bonsaso community?

Justification and Significance of the Study

Agriculture, industrialization and transportation are complementary in socioeconomic development yet the efficient functioning of these sectors has been an elusive pursuit in Ghana's development drive. The Bonsa Tyre Company was one such company which demonstrates these interdependent and complementary sectors yet the dominant story of its history is a single narrative of deficiencies and exploitation. Indeed, we must recognize its shortfalls but in doing so we should not neglect its impact on the wider Ghanaian society. Considering how rubber and the Bonsa Tyre Company have been significant to Ghana's motor transport industry and the Bonsaso community,

it is quite surprising that the literature on the Bansa Tyre Company has overlooked this essential part of the narrative. This work will therefore contribute to filling the lacuna in the existing knowledge in connection to Ghana's transport history as well as community histories. It contributes to our understanding of how large corporations and government entities interact and impact the lives of ordinary people.

Literature Review

Rubber, Industrialization and Transport.

This literature review focuses on three key areas; rubber, industrialization and motor transport in Ghana. This is crucial for understanding the broader context in which the Bansa Tyre Company operated, potential interdependencies and its significance within the country's economic and social landscape.

It is important to begin the literature review by first looking at the development of the rubber industry. The rubber industry is intricately connected to the global production and supply chain of tyre production. It is therefore crucial for understanding the connection and implications of global tyre production in Ghana. This is the main focus of the next chapter.

Rubber production in Africa and other places in the world has received increasing attention in scholarship. Various literature have shown the complexities within the rubber ecosystem and its implications for local and industrial development. The economic and social impact of rubber production and trade in West Africa and other regions has been the subject of various scholarly works. For instance, J. F. Munro's work examined the limited lasting impact of British capital on rubber planting in Africa, attributing it to the colonial government's unenthusiastic attitude.¹¹ In a

¹¹ Forbes J. Munro, "Monopolists and speculators: British investment in West African rubber, 1905–1914." *The Journal of African History* 22, no. 2 (1981): 263-278.

recent study, Thomas K Duoku's gives insight into the development of rubber in Liberia and Malaysia. He identifies the factors that have hindered Liberia's rubber industry development, such as lack of industrial policies, value addition, finance, and political stability, and contrasts them with the factors that have enabled Malaysia's rubber industry to flourish, such as industrial master plans, export-oriented industrialization, and public-private partnerships. He argues that Liberia should develop a rubber manufacturing plan to diversify its economy, create jobs, and increase income.¹² These works collectively emphasize the significant but complex influence of the rubber trade on the African economy since the 19th centuries and speaks to general and specific commonalities in Ghana's experience with rubber as a local resource.

Rubber production in Ghana is a subject that has received some considerable scholarly attention yet the focus does not cover much of its industrial aspect or any relation to Ghana's transport history. Even so, some historical accounts that focused on its agrarian aspect are scanty and are usually presented as peripheral to broad historical narratives. For instance, Francis Agbodeka has touched on the origins of cash crops including oil palm, cotton, rubber, coffee, cocoa, and citrus in Ghana, their rise into prominence as well as their decline thereof as part of his narrative of the economic history of Ghana.¹³ Agbodeka also examined colonial governments' commitment to agricultural diversification and the economic imperatives for this cause. In a similar vein Kwamina Dickson in his "*Historical Geography of Ghana*", gives an overview of rubber and other cash crops such as cocoa. On the rubber industry (the 1880s to the 1930s) he presents the fluctuating fortunes of wild rubber exports and a summary of plantation rubber

¹²Thomas K. Duoku, *A Comparative analysis of the rubber industries in Liberia and Malaysia: Lessons for industrial policy*, abstract (University of Johannesburg, 2021), IV, <http://hdl.handle.net/102000/0002>

¹³ Francis, Agbodeka. *An Economic History of Ghana from the Earliest Time*. Accra: Ghana University Press, 1992.

production in the First World War setting.¹⁴ He also indicates that it was a part of diversification efforts but provides no further explications. Similarly, Reynolds has argued that efforts towards the establishment of agriculture plantations (including cotton, coffee, oil palm, and later cocoa) were slow and difficult but they ushered in significant institutional changes in Gold Coast traditional society.¹⁵ These studies present brief overviews of the rubber industry in Ghana yet they fail to provide significant details on the rubber industry and industrial development in Ghana. Although the studies do not establish any clear connection between the rubber industry, industrial development and transport history of Ghana, they provide this work with significant indicators of the beginning and development of rubber as a cash crop.

Some literature specifically on the rubber industry in Ghana focused largely on the commercial, social and economic significance of rubber and its ecological impact. This focus is tilted towards wild rubber production with little or no emphasis on plantation (large-scale) rubber cultivation for manufacturing. Indeed, the rubber industry in Ghana was of great significance in Ghana's economic development in the nineteenth century as attested by the current literature on rubber production in Ghana. Kwame Arhin in his earlier work in 1972 on the rubber trade between Asante and the Gold Coast in the 1890s posits that the rubber trade was a prominent activity and that it was the seedbed of some present Ghanaian economic institutions.¹⁶

Raymond Dumett also shares a similar view that the rubber trade was an innovative response of Africans to the changing forces of the global market. In his work on the rubber trade of the Gold Coast and Asante in the nineteenth century, he intimates that "the export trade in wild

¹⁴ Kwamina B. Dickson, *Historical Geography of Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 162-165. See above

¹⁵ Edward, Reynolds. *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast, 1807-1874*. Beccles and Colchester: Longman Groups Limited, 1974.

¹⁶ Kwame Arhin, "The Ashanti Rubber Trade with the Gold Coast in the Eighteen-Nineties", *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Jan., 1972): 32-43. Check journal title

rubber occupies an important place in the nineteenth-century economic history of the Gold Coast and Asante, and the impetus which it gave to the future economic development of the country was greater than is commonly recognized” as it enabled the colony to diversify its export bill at a time when prices of other export commodities were fluctuating.¹⁷ Dumett also points to some of the earliest ecological effects of wild rubber tapping in Ghana’s forest.

In another work in 1980, Arhin’s assessment of the economic and social significance of rubber production and exchange in the Gold Coast and Ivory Coast reaffirms Arhin’s earlier argument that the rubber industry, was responsible for ushering the people of west-central Ghana and the eastern Ivory Coast in the use of cash and also for bringing changes in land tenure that matched those of cocoa production and that it was based on a slave mode of production.¹⁸

The ongoing discussion thus emphasizes the significance of the rubber industry in the nineteenth century but does not emphasize the role of pneumatic tyres in these developments. The second chapter of this work demonstrates how these developments in the rubber industry were a result of the expanding pneumatic tyre industry used in motor transport in the nineteenth century. Additionally, it shows that colonial policy on restrictions on rubber products during the interwar period was a contributory factor to the tyre scarcity that affected motor transport during the 1940s. Moreover, it shows that the significance of the rubber industry was not limited only to the nineteenth century when it became the foundation for the establishment and production of locally manufactured tyres for motor transport in Ghana.

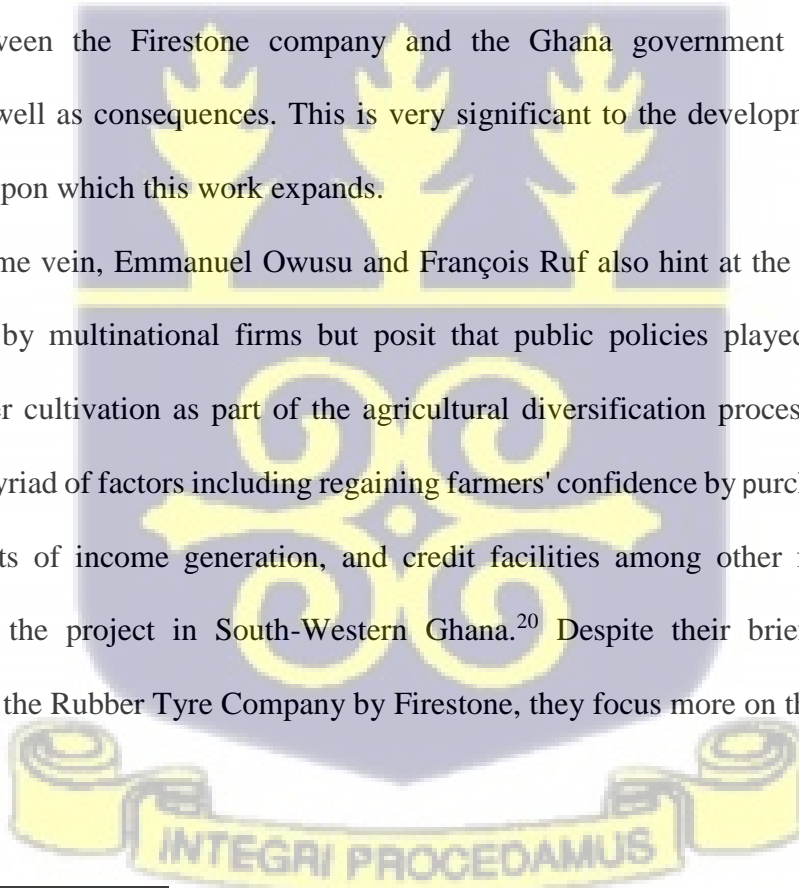
Another addition to the literature on the rubber industry from the twentieth century has also examined the rubber industry from a neo-colonial perspective. One such work is Akilagpa

¹⁷ Raymond Dumett, “The Rubber Trade of the Gold Coast and Asante in the Nineteenth Century: African Innovation and Market Responsiveness”, *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1971): 79-101.

¹⁸ Kwame Arhin, "The Economic and Social Significance of Rubber Production and Exchange on the Gold and Ivory Coasts, 1880-1900." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 20(1980): 49-62.

Sawyerr's "Multinational Corporations and Development: The Case of the Rubber Industry in Ghana" which demonstrates from a dependency perspective how multinational firms perpetuate underdevelopment in the periphery through the export of capital to the metropolis. Focusing on the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company he highlights the extant conditions in Ghana that made this possible for this multinational company to establish dominance over the Bonsaso tyre project and the mechanism through which it established control over rubber production enabling the appropriation of surplus value from the enterprise.¹⁹ But as he indicated the work is based on incomplete information and views expressed are provisional and thus require a further detailed study on the subject. Nevertheless, his work discusses in detail sections of the agreement of partnership between the Firestone company and the Ghana government and some of its implications as well as consequences. This is very significant to the development of the Bona Tyre Company upon which this work expands.

In the same vein, Emmanuel Owusu and François Ruf also hint at the domination of the rubber industry by multinational firms but posit that public policies played a major role in expanding rubber cultivation as part of the agricultural diversification process in Ghana. They indicate that a myriad of factors including regaining farmers' confidence by purchasing the product and the prospects of income generation, and credit facilities among other factors compelled farmers to join the project in South-Western Ghana.²⁰ Despite their brief mention of the establishment of the Rubber Tyre Company by Firestone, they focus more on the development of



¹⁹ Akilagpa Sawyerr "Multinational Corporations and Development: The Case of the Rubber Industry in Ghana" in *Law in the Political Economy of Public Enterprise: African Perspectives*, ed. Yash Ghai, (New York, NY: International Legal Centre, 1977), 267-294.

²⁰ Emmanuel Akwasi Owusu and François Ruf, "From Firestone to Michelin, a History of Rubber Cultivation in a Cocoa-Growing Country: Ghana", in François Ruf and Götz Schroth eds., *Economics and Ecology of Diversification; the Case of Tropical Tree Crops* (Springer: New York, 2015), 179-181

rubber cultivation in Ghana highlighting major milestones and setbacks over the years and the factors responsible for these developments.

Along similar lines, Keri Lambert's article "Tapping Ghanaians", 1957-66, shows how visions for post-colonial independence were engaged and enacted on the ground at rubber farms and factories in Nkrumah's Ghana. This paper examines the interplay between natural resource processing and political spaces and how people fashioned ideas of citizenship and sovereignty. She concludes that the rubber project was pinned to its future target and failed to consider the process of achieving it. Also, Ghanaians exploited the nation-building mantra of the project by participating in state projects as a means of preserving some degree of personal sovereignty and security.²¹ This work provides pertinent discussions on the rubber industry under the Nkrumah government and hints at the beginning of the tyre company at Bonsaso which became known as Firestone Ghana Limited under the NLC government.

The perspective Sawyer presents is limited by the fact that it does not take into account the role of local participation in the Bona tyre project. On the contrary, Emmanuel Owusu François Ruf and Lambert demonstrate various levels of Ghanaian agency in the rubber industry and what incentives underpinned them. Lambert even goes further to question whether the Bona Tyre Company will be of any benefit to the ordinary Ghanaian however she does not probe any further. Lambert opens up the discussion for this work to examine which ways the Bona Tyre Company was beneficial to ordinary Ghanaians including motorists and the Bonsaso community. In this vein, chapters 4 and 5 contribute to the narrative by stressing the significance of the Bona Tyre Company to Ghana's socio-economic development as shown by its role in Ghana's tyre industry and the development of the Bona Community.

²¹ Keri Lambert, "Tapping Ghanaians, 1957-66" (Paper, Yale University, 2016), 1-28.

Apart from discussions on the rubber industry, other literature that looks at the industrial development in Ghana and has drawn a connection between cash crops such as rubber, and cocoa and industrial development, treated these agro-industrial connections as tangential to broader political and economic developments and even sometimes it is not mentioned at all. But because the Bansa Tyre Company was part of Ghana's import substitution industries, this literature is important to this work to understanding the broader politico-economic settings within which the Bansa Tyre Company emanated and thrived. For instance, Kodwo Ewusi's work published in 1981 details the process of industrialization in Ghana from 1950-1970. This paper examines the extent to which Ghana's expectations of industrialization with its attendant benefits have been met; and what prospects will emerge for manufacturing industries in Ghana under the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS). It suggests that the ideal industrial development should be one of dispersal to achieve a balanced development in the nation.²² Ewusi's work thus draws attention to concerns about the spatial distribution and the currents that should dictate its directions and so enables this work to consider the spatial considerations for the siting of the Bansa Tyre Company.

An equally important aspect of Ghana's agro-industrial drive hinges on how adding value to agrarian products can improve Ghana's exports and how these industries are spatially distributed across the country. In a working paper published in 2014, Ackah, Adjasi and Turkson highlight how the various industrialization policies in independent Ghana from the 1960s up to the 2000s promote the spatial distribution of industries away from the current over-concentration of industries within urban areas.²³ Like Ewusi this work also draws attention to examining in closer

²² Kodwo Ewusi, *The Process of Industrialization in Ghana; 1950 -1975*. (ISSER working paper, September, 1981),1-99, <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/>

²³ Charles Ackah, Charles Adjasi, and Festus Turkson, *scooping study on the evolution of industry in Ghana*, (WIDER working paper, 2014), 1-39.

detail the considerations for the establishment of a rubber-tyre industry in an area such as Bonsaso. This work also gives a historical overview of industrial development in Ghana among other things. Yet similar to the preceding literature the focus does not go beyond government policies. Chapter 3 of this work therefore discusses other factors aside from government policies that emerged in determining the spatial distribution of such industries and in this specific instance, the Bona Tyre Company and examines whether they had any significant effect on government decisions. It is evident in this chapter the siting of a complex one as the siting of the Bona Tyre Company has demonstrated. It was a space for technical consideration, contending interests and concerns.

On a similar trajectory, James Pickett and E. Shaeeldin in an insightful work highlighted the nature of the agro-industrial policy landscape in Ghana. They reveal that the cause of the dismal economic fortunes from the 1950s along the lines of industrialization lay mostly in internal policy, which, contrary to sound advice given by Arthur Lewis in 1953, discriminated against agriculture and increasingly inhibited market forces. Nevertheless, Ghana's later attempt at economic recovery included a focus on agriculture and it factored in realistic exchange rates and market forces.²⁴ Although this work skews much towards the cocoa industry it gives a bird's eye view of the forces which shaped Ghana's agro-industrial trajectory and thus enables this work to appreciate why the Bona Tyre Company was preceded by investment in rubber cultivation.

William F. Steel evaluates different policies by analyzing their impact on economic efficiency and capacity utilization in import substitution (IS) manufacturing industries. His work posits that Ghana adopted policies aimed at industrialization and at replacing imports with domestic production before it ran into balance-of-payments problems. In the 1960s, foreign exchange became an important constraint and Import Substitution industries experienced

²⁴ James Pickett and E. Shaeeldin, *Comparative Advantage in Agriculture in Ghana* (working paper, OECD Development Centre, 1990), 1-32

stagnation and under-utilization of capacity.²⁵ This work examines Ghana's industrialization policies and provides an opportunity to examine how the various policies played out in the development of specific IS industries like the Bonsa Tyre Company. Also taking a look at Ghana from a structural perspective, Remi Jedwab and Robert Darko Osei's case study investigates the causes and consequences of the lack of structural change in Ghana over the period 1960-2010.²⁶ By examining Ghana from this perspective they bring out how changes in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors of the economy affect development and thus stimulate my thought as to how such macro-economic changes reflect in the daily socio-economic activities of firms and communities within which the various aspects of production occur. It is indicated in chapter four of this work how government actions and policies during the 1970s contributed to the decline of the Bonsa Tyre company and weakened its market position.

The only work that relates closely to this study was done by Stephen Adei on "Technological Capacity and Aborted Industrialization in Ghana: The Case of the Bonsa Tyre Company." This paper examines the performance of Bonsa Tyre Company from the 1960s through to the 1980s under the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). It emphasizes how negligence to improve the technological capacity of the company during the Firestone years worked against the policy reforms of the SAP and the performance of the company.²⁷ This work gives significant details on the interrelation between policy and technology in the company and emphasises some of the shortfalls of the Bonsa Tyre Company. While this work focuses more on the technological shortfall of the firm, it downplays other factors and how they contributed to the

²⁵ William F. Steel. Import Substitution and Excess Capacity in Ghana. *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Jul., 1972): 212-240.

²⁶ Remi Jedwab and Robert Darko Osei. Structural Change in Ghana 1960-2010 (working paper, IIEP, September 2012): 1-45.

²⁷ Stephen Adei, "Technological Capacity and Aborted Industrialization in Ghana: The Case of the Bonsa Tyre Company." *World Development* 18 no.11 (1990): 1501-1511.

collapse of the company. While Adei's point is valid, one can argue that the factors for the collapse of the company were multifaceted. Other factors equally contributed to its final decline and collapse. In this vein, this work for instance emphasizes how other factors such as tyre politics affected the distributive network of the company. Moreover, Adei ends his study at the commencement of initial efforts by the PNDC government to rehabilitate the Bonsa Tyre Company. This work, therefore, peruses the rehabilitation years and how developments thereof add to our understanding of the decline of the Bonsa Tyre Company and its eventual shutdown. Again he does not concern himself with accessing the impact of the company's tyre production on the development of Ghana's motor transport sector. This is highlighted in this study.

An essential group of literature significant to our appreciation of the history of the Bonsa Tyre Company in Ghana is on road and motor transport. These works examine how transport infrastructure creates rippling socio-economic consequences even beyond its core function and provide a broader purview on how to approach the history of the Bonsa Tyre Company. Though specifically focused on road infrastructure, they significantly detail the beginnings of motor transport in the Gold Coast and are useful to understanding the early developments of what was to become Ghana's motor transport industry.

Scholars like Dickson have also highlighted the beginnings of road transportation and its development from around 1850. He discusses the colonial initiative as well as local initiatives towards road construction and the undercurrents for these actions and also highlights some of the economic benefits these roads generated especially for the cocoa farmer.²⁸ In a similar line, Elizabeth Wrangham situates the development of road transport in the Gold Coast before the First World War period and delineates how regardless of colonial transport policy which was inclined

²⁸Kwamina B. Dickson, "The development of road transport in southern Ghana and Ashanti since about 1850." *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 5, no. 1 (1961): 33-42.

towards railways, local initiatives led to the expansion of the road transport to the detriment of railway transport. She argues that the expansion of road transport during the war was nothing short of a road revolution which shows that the Ghanaians were not passive to the colonial experience but exploited the colonial system to their advantage.²⁹

Samuel Nteuwusu also presents a historical study of a ‘motor road’ linking the north of the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) to the south. It is concerned with the construction of a two hundred and thirty-four miles (about three hundred and seventy-eight kilometres) road linking Kumasi to Tamale via Salaga—what became popularly known in colonial discourse as ‘The Great North Road’. In doing so he interrogates the rationale for the construction of the road and the way and manner in which the road was used. This paper argues that the construction and use of the Northern Road had far-reaching implications in the socio-economic history of the Gold Coast concerning labour, trade and colonial administration.³⁰ Dickson and Nteuwusu provide insights into the development of Ghana’s road network and stimulate my thoughts to highlight how motor transport networks in Ghana also shaped the distribution network of the Bansa Tyre Company.

Other works have also looked at the emergent cultures and practices related to motor transport. Jojada Verrips and Birgit Meyer use “Kwaku’s car” in the 1990s to show the daily experiences and struggles of drivers with their vehicles. They explore the mundane as well as symbolical, material-technological and spiritual dimensions that emerge out of the use of automobiles. Thus, demonstrating why and how cars in Ghana are culturally redefined. They conclude that the pragmatic adaptations to cars and the cultures that surround car use in Ghana

²⁹ Elizabeth Wrangham, "An African road revolution: the Gold Coast in the period of the Great War." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 32, no. 1 (2004): 1-18.

³⁰ Samuel Aniegye Nteuwusu, "The road to development: the construction and use of 'the Great North Road' in Gold Coast Ghana." *ASC Working Paper Series* 114 (2014). In another work the author also focuses on highlighting the role of Northerners in the development of Tuudu and details the role they have played particularly in the development of transportation in Tuudu as a hub of transportation in Accra. See Samuel Aniegye Nteuwusu, *settling in and holding on: a socio-economic history of northern traders and transporters in Accra's Tuudu, 1908-2008*, vol. 40 (2012).

though stemming from a dire economic situation speak to tremendous ingenuity.³¹ Jacob O. Sarfo's article provides a review of the existing Ghanaian 'Tro-Tro' transport industry and its impact on culture, socioeconomic and psychological dynamics. It explores some historic evolutions that the 'Tro-Tro' business has accomplished so far in Ghana. It concludes that the Tro-Tro nurtures a collective life force among the three human elements; the 'tro-tro' driver, mate and passengers. Thus, the 'Tro-Tro' drivers, mates and passengers build a system of culture that is mutually dependent. This relationship goes beyond the service provider - consumer bonds. It fosters a communal spirit among the three groups of human elements, though each has its distinct roles.³² This article points to some of the emergent cultures that surround motor transport but in this case as a transactional process. These works open up the discussion for this study to also assess how motorists related to locally manufactured tyres and distribution by the Bonsa Tyre Company.

Jennifer Hart's "Ghana on the Go" also traces the forces and changes underpinning the emergent automobile transport system in Ghana during the twentieth century. The author discusses the remarkable socio-political, socio-economic, cultural and technological changes that emerged and accompanied the use of motor transport by Ghanaians in the pursuit of their needs. She aptly characterizes the motor transport industry as an industry of scarcity and tyre shortage as greatly inimical and also hints at Nkrumah considering establishing a tyre factory. Yet the magnitude of this problem and how this was resolved by the establishment of the Bonsa Tyre Company was left untouched.³³



³¹ Jojada Verrips and Birgit Meyer. "Kwaku's car: the struggles and stories of a Ghanaian long-distance taxi-driver." In *Car cultures*, 153-184. (Routledge: 2020).

³² Jacob Owusu Sarfo, "'Bone-Shakers' and Contemporary 'Tro-Tro' in Ghana: Implications for Traffic and Transport Psychology." *Africa: History and Culture* 1 (2016): 15-20.

³³ Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the go: African mobility in the age of motor transportation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016). 145.

The myriad of literature discussed above gives varying and detailed accounts of the development of motor transport in Ghana from the colonial period to the contemporary time. They focus on how the interactions with automobile technologies have shaped and been shaped by Ghanaians in their daily trajectories of life. Yet, considering that globally tyres play a tremendously important role in propelling motor vehicles or road transport, it is quite surprising that the literature on Ghana's transport history and culture has paid little attention to the prominence of Ghana's defunct tyre-producing company, Bonsa Tyre Company and how it adds to our understanding of Ghana's transport history. Building on this extant literature, this study contributes to this area of study by showing the experiences of motorists and the general contribution of the company to Ghana's transport system. It thus accentuates the significance of the tyre industry to Ghana's automobile narratives.

The Study Area; A brief history.

The Bonsaso community is situated southwest of Tarkwa in the Tarkwa district of the Western region. Bonsa is known for its fertile farmlands and reliable source of water which attracted settlers to the area.³⁴ The people did alluvial gold washing in the Bonsa River.³⁵ Informants described a crystal clear river that was central to their livelihood; and safe for drinking, fishing and other domestic purposes.³⁶ They were also involved in food crops such as cassava, plantain, and cocoyam, as well as cash crop cultivation such as cocoa, coconuts, oranges, and oil palm.³⁷

³⁴ K.J. Bansah et al., "Socioeconomic and Environmental Assessment of Informal Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in Ghana," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 202 (2018): 465-475.

³⁵ Raymond Dummet, "Geological structure and the location of Gold in Ghana", in *Gold mining frontiers, African Labour and colonial capitalism in the Gold Coast, 1875-1900* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio university press. 1998),31.

³⁶ The current state of the river is an entirely different reality from the narratives respondent had given. Its colour is a turbid brown colour which is indicative of the current activities of illegal mining in the locality and the toll it has had on the river.

³⁷ PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/1686.

The Bonsa River divides the town into two namely Bonsaso No.1 and Bonsaso No. 2. The indigenous people (Wasa Pepesa) occupy the larger portion No.1 while the Akwapim settlers (from Larteh) occupy the smaller portion No. 2, at the Tarkwa end of the river.³⁸ The numerical naming of the community accentuates the settlement pattern and order of settlement. It enables a clear demarcation between the two settlements and their distinct identities.

The history of settlement in the area consists of two narratives, one account recounts the migration of the Pepesa indigenes to the area for farming and the other recounts that of the Larteh migrants. The account of the indigenes holds that they moved from Dompim (see the map in Fig. 1) to settle near the Bonsa River for farming. As such to this day their political allegiance and social practices are aligned with that of Dompim. It is difficult to identify what time these migrations occurred but by 1824 Bonsaso was a settled community. It was around the Bonsaso area that Sir Charles McCarthy was defeated and killed in the Battle of Nsamanko in 1824.³⁹

Around 1882, during the gold boom in the Wasa area, one Commander Rumsey described that a ferry was run across the Bonsa River a charge was taken for each trip and that the Bonsa community mainly consisted of huts put up by mining companies.⁴⁰ The presence of the miners in the area may have attracted more people to migrate to the area. According to the account of the Akuapim settlers, they settled at the Tarkwa side of the Bonsa River for farming as well as timber business. It is also not clear what times the Akuapim migrated to the area but by the 1950s they had permanent residence at Bonsa in Atakora-Kurom with a recognized leader in the person of

³⁸ Barnicon Property Valuation and Consultancy Services, "Valuation Report on Assets of Bonsa Tyre Company Limited," vol. 1 (Accra, Ghana, 2003),1-2. This document was obtained from Mr. Opoku Mensah, a former worker of the Bonsa Company.

³⁹ Government of the Gold Coast, The Gold Coast Review Vol. II. No.2. July-December (Accra: The Government Printer, 1926),169.

⁴⁰ Government of the Gold Coast, The Gold Coast Review Vol II No.1. January-June (Accra: The Government Printer, 1926), 99. Commander Rumsey was instructed to investigate the route from Axim to Tarkwa.

Opanin Mensa Atakora.⁴¹ Traditionally both Bonsa No1 and No2 are under Dompim Pepesa within the Wasa Fiase Tradtional area.

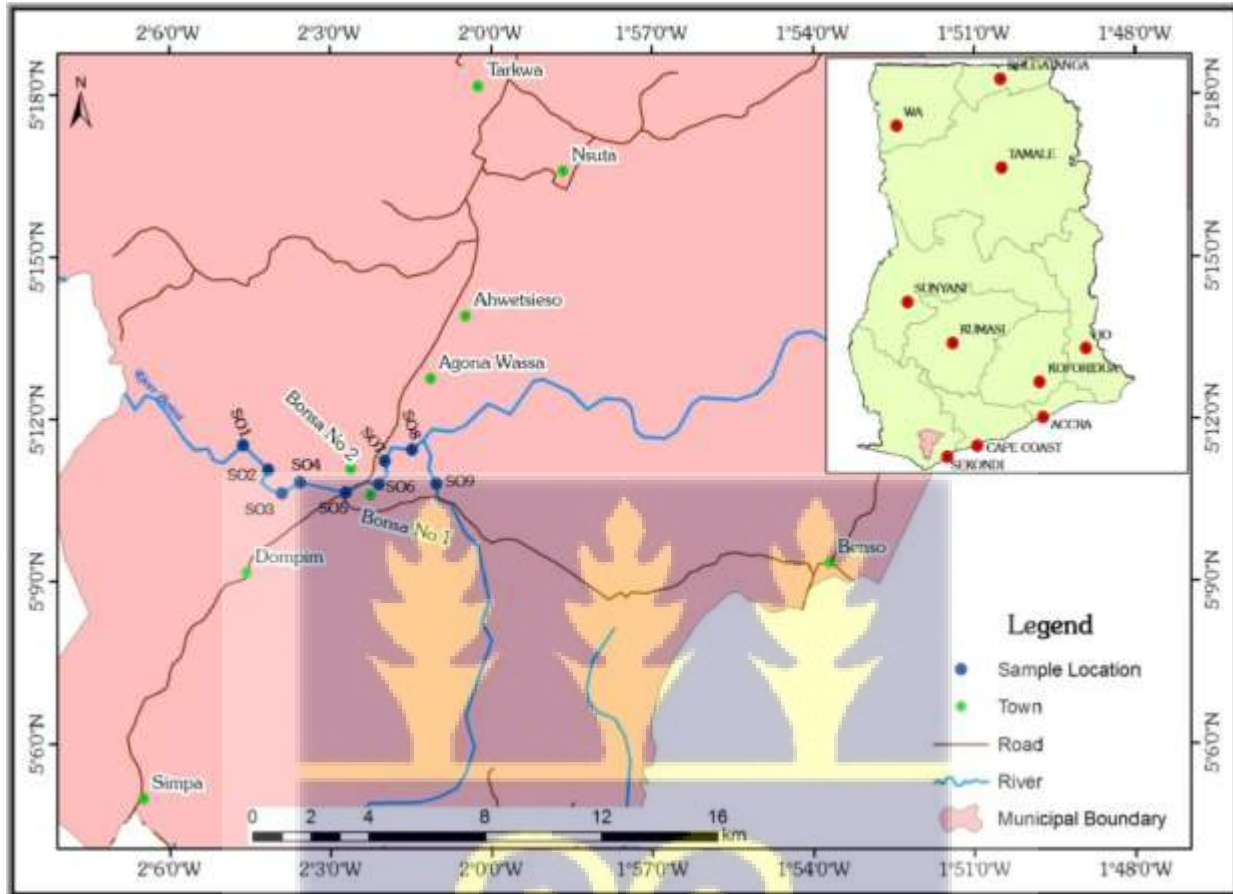


Figure 1. Location of Bonsa No 1 and Bonsa No 2. Source; K.J. Bansah et al., “Socioeconomic and Environmental Assessment of Informal Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in Ghana,” *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 469.

Methodology

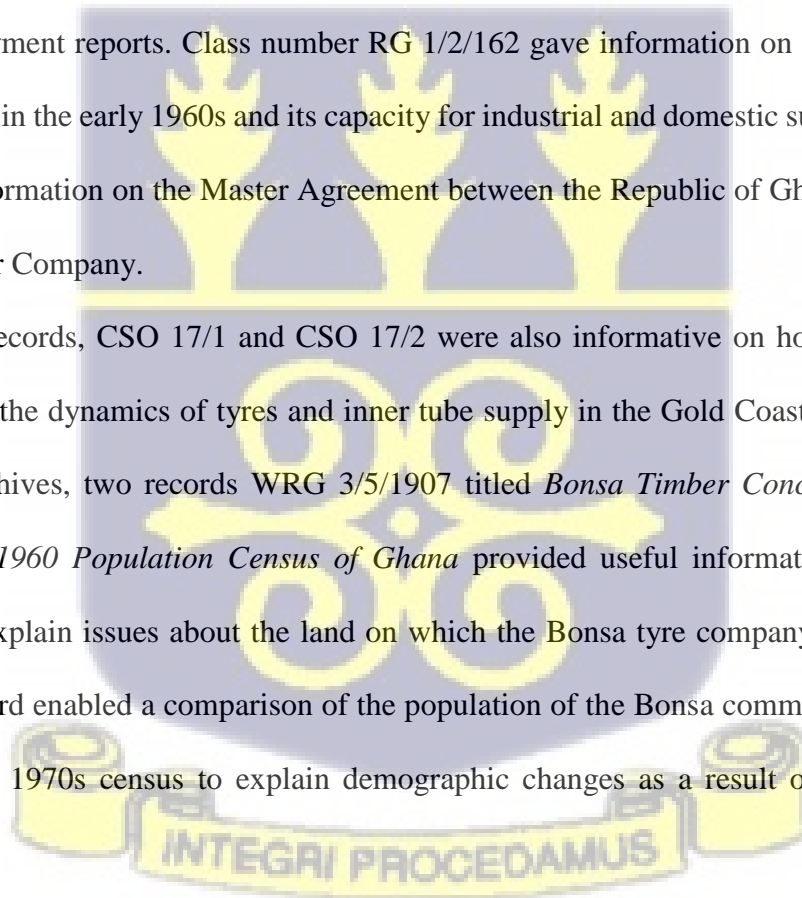
This study is a historical work using a qualitative approach relying primarily on primary sources and complemented by secondary sources. It draws mainly on archival materials,

⁴¹PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 3/5/1907, Bonsa Timber concession.

newspapers and information from oral accounts of former employees of the Bonsa Tyre Company, retired drivers and residents of the Bonsa community.

Archival materials were sourced from the Ghana Public Records Administration and Archives Department (hereafter PRAAD) in Accra and Sekondi and documents from the private records of some respondents. At the national archives in Accra, documents from the record class RG 1/2 and 7/1 provided important information on industrial development in Ghana. They provided very useful information on the development of the Bonsa Tyre Factory from the beginning of its establishment. Issues raised in the files include contract agreements, financial transactions, reports on the status of the factory, challenges with its construction, the record of workers and payment reports. Class number RG 1/2/162 gave information on the state of power supply in Ghana in the early 1960s and its capacity for industrial and domestic supply. RG 1/2/163 also provide information on the Master Agreement between the Republic of Ghana and Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company.

The following records, CSO 17/1 and CSO 17/2 were also informative on how British Rubber control affected the dynamics of tyres and inner tube supply in the Gold Coast in the 1940s. At the Sekondi archives, two records WRG 3/5/1907 titled *Bonsa Timber Concession* and WRG 24/2/292 titled *1960 Population Census of Ghana* provided useful information on the Bonsa community to explain issues about the land on which the Bonsa tyre company was established. The second record enabled a comparison of the population of the Bonsa community in the 1960s with that of the 1970s census to explain demographic changes as a result of the Bonsa Tyre Company.



Samuel Nteuwusu has lamented how the poor state of archival record keeping in Ghana pushes important documents meant for state and institutional archives into the public domain.⁴² And rightly as he observed, several documents including an evaluation report on the Bona Tyre Company, an industrial agreement between Bona Tyre Company workers and the government, magazines and brochures which were supposed to be in the archives were obtained from some respondents and were very informative to explaining the development of the factory and its relation with the host community.

Jennifer Hart has also emphasized the fact that Ghana's National Archive is less productive as a source for postcolonial history particularly between 1966 and 1983 when Ghana's political scene was very volatile. Therefore newspapers and oral accounts are essential to circumvent this peculiar challenge.⁴³ Newspapers (both print and online) from the 1960s to the 2000s, particularly Ghanaian Times, Daily Graphic and some online news such as Ghanaweb, Washington Post, Modern Ghana and Prime News are also an essential part of this work and they provided, public experiences, opinions, and reports on local and international issues relating to the development of the Bona Tyre Company as well as Ghana's motor transport development. The print newspapers were sourced from the Institute of African Studies (IAS) library at the University of Ghana. The periodicals of the Africana Section of the Balme Library of the University of Ghana, the IAS library and online sources provided a useful repository of several reports and departmental reports, which added to the details on Ghana's transport industry and the Bona Tyre Company's rehabilitation project.

⁴² Samuel Nteuwusu, "Banana and Peanuts Archives of Ghana", *History of Africa* vol. 44 (2017), 285-294. A respondent asked for money before he would release some of these documents. Apparently he was a former administrative employee and with the collapse of the company has hoarded a number of relevant document of the company.

⁴³ Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African mobility in the age of motor transportation* (Indiana University press; 2016), 25.

These were complemented by oral interviews conducted with 11 respondents at Bonsaso. The sample size was determined by the availability, knowledge and lived experiences of respondents. Moreover, by the tenth interview, no new information was evident. These respondents included former workers of the Bona Tyre Company residents of the community and some community heads. They provided information on the activities of the tyre company as well as how the Bona Tyre Company affected the lives of the people during the active years of the company and how it impacted the community after its collapse. In exploring the experiences of motorists with the Bona Tyre Company tyres beyond the narrative of newspapers, four drivers, two retired drivers and two active drivers were also interviewed. Respondents gave information on the nature of the Bona Tyre Company tyres and their usage in comparison to other tyres they had used. Respondents were sampled using purposive and snowballing sampling technique. This was very important because employees of the company as well as drivers who had used the Bona Tyre Company tyres and services are quite difficult to identify therefore it was very useful that initial respondents referred me to other respondents who could provide the information needed.

Secondary sources including books and journal articles reviewed in above were also examined to give a wider context and complement the primary information. These sources provided a rich pool of information from which various themes discussions in this work were derived, analysed and presented in the various chapters.

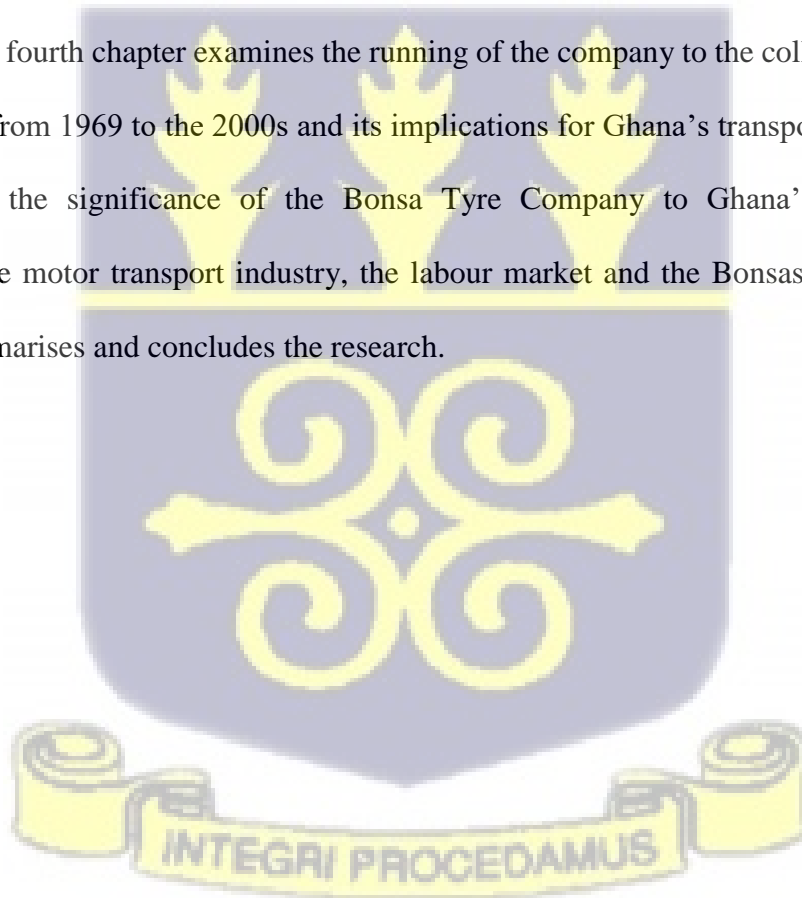
The multiplicity of sources used was to overcome inherent limitations of such as biases in the data, gaps in the records, and the potential for misinterpretation. The pool of data from the sources were cross-verified with each other and carefully evaluated to ensure accuracy and to help identify and check errors or biases present.⁴⁴ Extensive notes were taken from the archival sources,

⁴⁴ See Mary L. Rampolla, "Working with sources" in *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 9th ed, (Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's), 20-37.

interviews were transcribed and analysed in connection with major debates raised in the secondary materials to answer the research questions raised in this work.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter one is the Introduction or Background to the research, literature review, statement of the research problem, research questions, the objectives for the research, significance and justification for the study, source and methodology, and chapter outline. Chapter two examines the historical circumstances that resulted in the setting up of the Bona Tyre Company whereas Chapter three focuses on the origin and establishment of the Bona Tyre Company and its undercurrents from 1957-1969. The fourth chapter examines the running of the company to the collapse of the Bona Tyre Company from 1969 to the 2000s and its implications for Ghana's transport sector. Chapter Five highlights the significance of the Bona Tyre Company to Ghana's socio-economic development; the motor transport industry, the labour market and the Bonsaso community and chapter six summarises and concludes the research.



CHAPTER TWO

MOTOR TRANSPORT, TYRE MANUFACTURING AND RUBBER PRODUCTION IN THE GOLD COAST

Introduction

This chapter explores the historical antecedents and how they connect to the setting up of Bonsa Tyre Company during the 1960s. It shows the connection between Ghana's rubber industry with tyre manufacturing and supply and the development of motor transport in Ghana. Hence, it demonstrates that not only was Ghana's rubber industry a part of the global transport industry in the 19th century, but it also became the basis for the establishment of domestic tyre manufacturing in Ghana for motorists and thus an intricate part of the development of motor transport in Ghana.

Motor vehicles have been a great invention which has revolutionized human transport and mobility. Not only has it reduced travel time, but it has also enabled comfortable and easy transportation of people and goods, ideas, and culture in ways previously unimagined. One thing that is evident in motor transport is its complex system of interconnected parts including the body, engines, brakes, tyres etc.⁴⁵ Pneumatic tyres are an essential component to the establishment of the automobile mechanism. Tyres play four key functions including bearing a load (support), acting as a spring (absorption), conveying driving and braking forces (transmission), and facilitating the steering of the vehicle (turning). These are vital functions in which the tyres as part of the vehicle serve as an intermediary in establishing a mutual relationship between the vehicle and the surface of the road.⁴⁶ As rightly noted by Ishikawa, without rubber, the modern-day

⁴⁵ T. C. Barker, "The international history of Motor transport", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.20 (1985), 3.

⁴⁶ Yasuhiro Ishikawa, "Systematic Review of Tyre Technology", *National Museum of Nature and Science*

pneumatic tyre would not exist, thus with the discovery of the technology of vulcanizing rubber and the expanding automobile industry, rubber became pivotal in the tyre manufacturing industry.⁴⁷

In the Gold Coast, there were no motor vehicles until the early 1900s. However, their widespread use in Europe had a notable impact on the need for natural rubber, a key ingredient in tyre manufacturing.⁴⁸ As a result, the late 19th century saw a surge in rubber prices. Consequently, the proliferation of motor vehicles not only drove up the demand for more tyres but also triggered an increased need for rubber in regions like the Gold Coast and other rubber-producing areas around the globe. Thus, an account of motor transport and tyre manufacturing cannot be divorced from rubber production.

Rubber Production in the Gold Coast

In the seventeenth century, wild rubber (*funtumia elastica* and *Landophia owariensis*) was in abundance in parts of the tropical forest in the high rainfall zones of south-western Ghana and the relatively wet high forest region of Asante.⁴⁹ It had several practical uses in the local economy. When tapped the gummy latex was used to seal broken calabash, leaking canoes, earthenware and wooden receptacles.⁵⁰ From the late 1800s rubber production took a firm footing in the Gold Coast in response to spikes in demand for raw rubber in the global market because of the expansion of

Vol.16, (2011), 3. It is significant to note that rubber forms about 19 percent and 34 percent in passenger vehicle tyres and truck tyres respectively. US Tyre Manufacturing Association, *Whats in a Tire*, <https://www.ustires.org/whats-tire-0>

⁴⁷ Yasuhiro, "Systematic Review of Tyre Technology", 13-14. Vulcanized rubber involved the process of making rubber molecules to bond together resulting in a more elastic property. This process was discovered by C. Goodyear in 1839.

⁴⁸ Y. Harita, H. Kondo and Y. Ozawa, "Natural Rubber for the Tyre Industry" in *Chemistry, Manufacture and Application of natural Rubber* (Woodhead Publishing Limited; 2014), 325.

⁴⁹ Dickson, *A historical geography of Ghana*, 162.

⁵⁰ Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana*, 43-84.

pneumatic tyre production for motor vehicles. This technology began in Britain as an upgrade on solid rubber tyres for carriages, and bicycles and later in the 1920s larger tires were introduced for the then-expanding motor vehicles industry. It must be noted that many firms were set up for the rubber trade in West Africa but the enormity of Ghana's rubber industry is underscored by the concentration of seventeen (17) of these firms established and registered in Ghana by 1910.⁵¹ Rubber production in the Gold Coast increased rapidly to meet the demand, rising from 0.05 tonnes in 1880 to 691.57 tonnes in 1886. By 1892 rubber had surpassed palm oil as Gold Coast's leading agricultural export.⁵²

The south-western region in particular has been and remains a hotspot for rubber production in the country because of its suitable ecological conditions. Kwame Arhin indicates that the earliest supply of crude rubber came from peasant supply in the immediate Gold Coast hinterlands in areas including Akim, Krepi and Wassa.⁵³ It ushered in significant economic and institutional changes to the people of west-central Ghana in the use of cash and also for bringing changes in land tenure that matched those of cocoa production. The industry's contribution to the growth of the cash economy included the lease and grant of land to strangers for the establishment of rubber-producing villages; the practice of share-cropping; and the widespread use of slaves in the production and transportation of rubber for sale on the coast.⁵⁴ The rubber industry, therefore, played an important socio-economic role although it has always been treated as a minuscule industry. Notwithstanding its significance, it is quite puzzling with a tinge of irony that rubber for the manufacture of tyres, like other cash crops was transported on foot.

⁵¹ Agbodeka, an Economic History of Ghana from the Earliest Time, 43-84.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Kwame Arhin, "The Ashanti Rubber Trade with the Gold Coast in the Eighteen-Nineties", *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Jan., 1972), 32-43.

⁵⁴ Kwame Arhin, "The Economic and Social Significance of Rubber Production and Exchange on the Gold and Ivory Coasts, 1880-1900." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 20(1980), 49-62.

Tyres and Carriages in the Gold Coast

This subsection discusses the use of other non-vehicular tyres in the Gold Coast. The focus is on animal and human-drawn carriages. This discussion is important as it lays the foundation for discussing in much detail the introduction and use of pneumatic tyres following the introduction of motor vehicles. Vehicle tyres as we know them today have been a gradual improvement on the wheels used for wagons and carriages in Europe eventually leading to the application of solid rubber tyres and later the invention of the pneumatic tyres. The Gold Coast and neighbouring Western African territories although having been fairly familiar with wheeled transport even in the 1800s, appear to have not invented or adapted or made much use of it. For instance, in 1841 the Methodist Missionary Society delivered a wheeled carriage to Kumase as a present to the king and in the 1830s and 1840 British officials and local merchants kept wheeled carriages which were drawn by men.⁵⁵ Although scholars have not been unanimous on what exactly led to the seeming absence of wheeled technology, several reasons have been raised in an attempt to explain this situation including, lack of initiative, lack of economic conditions, absence of beasts of burden, and the prohibitive cost of creating and managing roads for wheeled transport.⁵⁶ Notwithstanding the many reasons, we may agree with Law that it was not an issue of an inability or the lack of interest to adopt wheeled vehicles but it most often had no effective practical usefulness at the period. In this vein, rubber in the Gold Coast had no application in such an industry of less utility but was useful as an export product from the nineteenth century. This was also in line with the British colonial policy of exploiting the colonies as a source of raw materials. Also as noted earlier many of the European firms established on the Gold Coast invested their energies in the wild

⁵⁵ Robin Law, "Wheeled Transport in Pre-Colonial West Africa." *Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 50 No. 3 (1980), 254.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 249-262.

rubber trade and a few others in plantation rubber cultivation. Thus European rubber firms in the Gold Coast did not engage in rubber processing for tyre manufacturing and therefore the transfer of such technology was highly unlikely.

Even in the export trade, the fortunes of the rubber export in the Gold Coast were not remarkable from the first decade of the twentieth century to the early mid-twentieth century, it was a period of uneven development as a result of the First and Second World wars and prohibitive colonial policies. Indeed, rubber production until the 20th century was a local initiative in the hands of local wild rubber producers and a few private and European firms. Until 1941 when the colonial government launched a rubber production campaign, it had not shown any significant interest in promoting rubber production though there were some experiments with rubber by the Department of Agriculture. Even so, the colonial administration's intervention was more of a move to facilitate its war agenda during the Second World War. During the war, the automobile industry focused on the production of military trucks such as Jeeps and war aircraft.⁵⁷ These were used to transport soldiers and for military supplies. Because these vehicles needed tyres to run, the British sought to gather as much rubber supply as it could get from all possible sources in its colonies including the Gold Coast for tyre manufacturing. This demand led to increased prices during the Second World War and witnessed a resuscitation of the rubber industry in the Gold Coast, yet the Board of Trade in the United Kingdom announced it would no longer purchase rubber after the end of the war. The British Colonial government discouraged its production in the Gold Coast and other colonies after the war as a move to stabilize the world prices of rubber.⁵⁸ The commercial market for rubber export in Ghana was thus closed. Rubber producers could no longer find a market for their produce

⁵⁷ J. Nyamwange and D. Nyamwang, "Major Innovations in Transportation: Evolution of Automobiles", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (March 2014), 42-42.

⁵⁸ Lambert, *Tapping Ghanaians*, 7. According to Lambert, Britain had invested much in the Malayan rubber and sought to eliminate any form of competition from other colonies.

largely because it was dependent on the export market and domestic uses of the rubber were not commercial enough to sustain the industry.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that even though the evolution of tyre technology as a gradual improvement of wheels used for wagons and carriages and had developed to integrate natural rubber; the local use of rubber in Ghana had no prospects for application of rubber to any independent indigenous rotary or wheeled transport. There were no attempts by European firms or the colonial government to establish any local rubber-tyre manufacturing industry on the Gold Coast using local rubber even though motor transports had taken root in the Gold Coast by the end of the Second World War. It was a typical situation of raw rubber extraction for export and import of “manufactures of rubber” including vehicle tyres.⁵⁹ This was certainly not circumstantial since the colonial government’s policy on the Gold Coast was largely against manufacturing within the colony.⁶⁰

Motor Vehicles and Tyres in the Gold Coast

The Gold Coast’s experience with tyres came with the introduction of motor vehicles to Ghana during the 1900s. The first motor car to be introduced in Ghana was a symbol of Western modernity in West Africa and luxury for Governor Nathan in 1902. Although some colonial officials saw the potential of using motor vehicles to facilitate colonial administration, the administration was rather enthused about railway transport.⁶¹ Yet by the 1930s, the motor car industry was booming under the initiative of local transport entrepreneurs at a remarkable speed. In 1921, there were 586 lorries and 214 cars in Accra alone; in the rest of the Eastern Province,

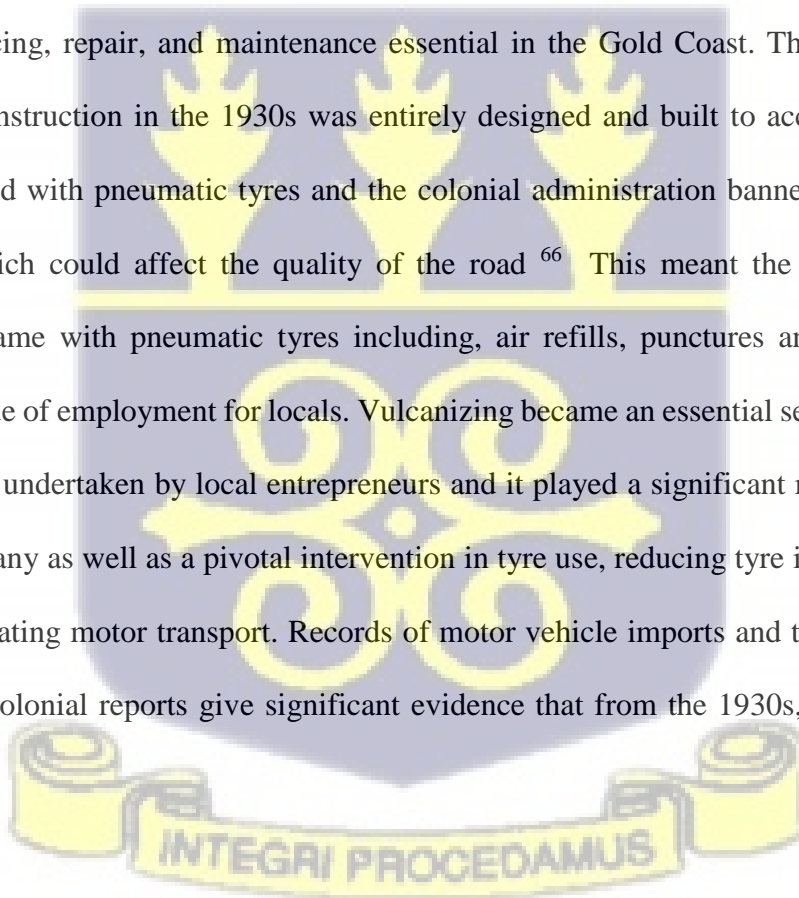
⁵⁹ Colonial Reports Annual, 1923-1924. Periodicals, Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon.

⁶⁰ Agbodeka, *Economic History of Ghana*, 134-135.

⁶¹ The British colonial government was more interested in promoting railway transport in the Gold Coast than motor transport. The government was concerned with controlling road transport to reduce competition with the government-owned railway.

there were 303 cars and 860 lorries.⁶² Also, between 1927 and 1928, 1,100 cars and 4,250 lorries were licensed and by 1930, 4,987 vehicles were licensed in the Gold Coast Colony.⁶³ By 1932 there were 4,141 commercial motor vehicles and 1,618 private cars and taxis registered on the Gold Coast. By the end of the 1930s, there were over 5,501 commercial vehicles and 2,076 private cars and taxis.⁶⁴ The direct implication of this soaring number of vehicles was that tyres were required to run them. In the absence of local manufacturing, these were imported just as the vehicles. Indeed, the constant addition to the mileage of roads in the Gold Coast was naturally accompanied by increased importations of motor vehicles and tyres.⁶⁵

The expansion of motor transport and the challenge of keeping a stable supply of tyres made tyre servicing, repair, and maintenance essential in the Gold Coast. This was significant because road construction in the 1930s was entirely designed and built to accommodate motor vehicles equipped with pneumatic tyres and the colonial administration banned the use of solid rubber tyres which could affect the quality of the road.⁶⁶ This meant the requirements and problems that came with pneumatic tyres including, air refills, punctures and worn-out tyres became an avenue of employment for locals. Vulcanizing became an essential service in the motor vehicle business undertaken by local entrepreneurs and it played a significant role as a source of livelihood for many as well as a pivotal intervention in tyre use, reducing tyre import in the Gold Coast and facilitating motor transport. Records of motor vehicle imports and tyre imports in the various annual colonial reports give significant evidence that from the 1930s, local vulcanizers



⁶² Colonial Reports Annual, 1922-1923.

⁶³ Colonial Annual report, 1927-1928, 27

⁶⁴ Hart, *Ghana on the go*, 47-48, 70-71.

⁶⁵ Colonial Annual report, 1926-1927.

⁶⁶ Colonial Annual Report, 1927-1928, 26.

helped to prolong the life of tyres and reduced imports (see fig. 1).⁶⁷ Moreover drivers also resorted to the use of old tyres to supplement their new ones.

Fig.1. Total Motor vehicle imports vs. Total tyre imports, 1931-1939.

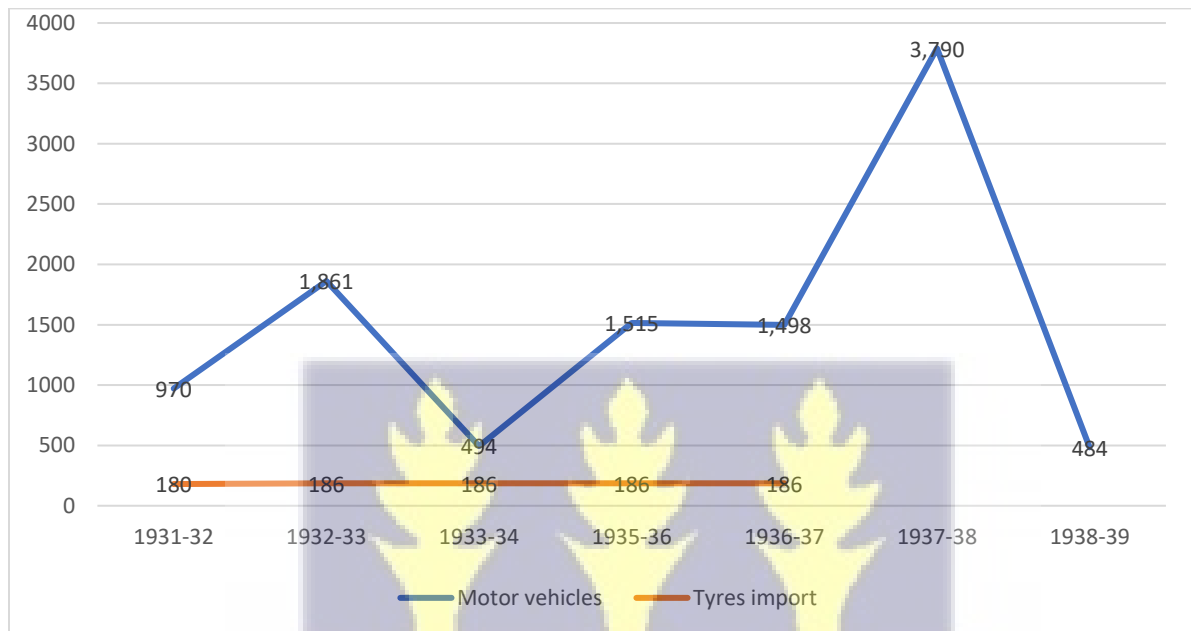


Figure 2. This data was extracted from Colonial Annual Reports 1931- 1939. Source: <https://libsysdigi.library.illinois.edu/ilharvest/Africana/Books2011-05/5530214/>

Regardless of the services available to motorists to prolong or supplement tyre supply, colonial policies also affected tyre supply within the Gold Coast. In 1941 when the British rubber in Malaya came under Japanese attack all effort was made to accumulate as much rubber supply as possible from all rubber-producing colonies. This was what manifested in the colonial administration’s promotion of rubber on the Gold Coast during the Second World War. In 1941 a Rubber Control Board was set up to advise and control how British rubber could be used to facilitate the war efforts.⁶⁸ From this point, the general policy was that all rubber and rubber

⁶⁷Colonial Annual Report, 1929-1930, 17.

⁶⁸ UK, parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Rubber Control, 03 February 1942, 1126 (Mr. Parker, member for Romford). <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1942/feb/03/rubber-control>

products including tyres and inner tubes were to be employed at full capacity towards war efforts. The Rubber Control Board regulated the purchase and export of tyres to colonies.⁶⁹ Consequently, this affected tyre supply by official colonial government suppliers such as crown agents in the colonies. From 1942, even tyres for government officials were strictly regulated and were only to be mounted on vehicles used in activities that would contribute to the war efforts. Thus, tyres for cars in the Gold Coast were in limited quantities.⁷⁰ It is clear from the foregoing that the tyre problem in the Gold Coast and its impact on the motor transport industry had everything to do with the British rubber control strategy.

Another contributing factor for these limited quantities was that the tyres were not made for local climatic conditions and, therefore, they deteriorated quickly, so stocks that were not purchased quickly stood the risk of becoming unusable.⁷¹ Tyre dealers were thus cautious not to import quantities that go to waste and affect their investment. This left the tyre industry at the mercy of local tyre dealers, mostly Syrian firms who took advantage of the limited supply and their monopoly to charge higher prices in the Gold Coast. For instance, in 1942, a letter from the Forest Department of Koforidua to the Commissioner of the Eastern Province lamented an increment in the price of tyres for one of their timber lorries. The initial arrangement with the Syrian tyre dealer was to buy the tyre at £7.10 but the next morning the dealer increased the price to £8. Eventually, the government was compelled to implement price control of tyres in the Gold Coast as well as other colonies such as Nigeria and Nyansaland.⁷²

⁶⁹GH/PRAAD CSO/ 17/1/130, Rubber tyre and Tubes- Application for permit to purchase 1942-1943.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ GH/PRAAD CSO 17/2/51, Motor vehicles, spare parts oil, etc. required by government departments 1938-1939.

⁷² PRAAD-Accra CSO/ 17/1/129, Motor tyres and inner tubes control of prices 1942.

The growing need for motor transport in Ghana as a result of the expansion of Ghana's economy led to a considerable increase in various types of motor vehicles for the movement of goods and people from the 1950s onward.⁷³ For instance, the total number of private vehicles had increased from 13,394 in 1956 to 27,270 in 1965,⁷⁴ indicating an average growth rate of 8.3% per annum. Again, official statistics indicated that about 3,800 of the 27,400 cars registered in 1965 were taxis generally commuting in towns with about 1,400 of them based in Accra only.⁷⁵ There was also the establishment of bus services run by municipal councils as well as the State Transport Corporation in Accra-Tema, Sekondi-Takoradi and Kumasi. But the transportation of people and goods, especially, market produce, from rural areas to villages and towns was predominantly done by smaller buses either 15-25 passenger Mercedes or Austin minibuses or mammy wagons capable of taking about 20-30 people or 1-3 tons of goods. In this combined category there was an increase from 8,451 in 1956 to 9,821 in 1965 reaching higher quantities of about 10,000 cars in 1960/61 and 1964. Cars used solely for the transport of goods including vans and pickups also increased from 5,772 in 1956 to 6,964 in 1965, thus showing an increase of 1,192.⁷⁶

The above statistics indicate a progressively expanding motor vehicle industry, adding to its registry by the year. Yet a challenge within this vibrant sector remained the nagging presence of the shortages of spare parts, fuel and most significantly tyres from the colonial period to the early post-independence period. This situation held dire consequences in the transport of goods

⁷³ The demand for motor transport in Ghana surged from the 1950s onwards due to economic growth, and other factors including urbanization, infrastructural development, and perhaps changing consumer preferences. As the country's economy expanded, there was a greater need for efficient transportation systems to facilitate the movement of goods and people. Urbanization further intensified the demand for motor vehicles to connect different regions and transport materials and products. Additionally, improved road networks made motor transport a more viable and convenient option. The rising incomes and changing lifestyles of Ghanaians also fuelled the desire for personal mobility, making motor vehicles an essential means of transportation for various purposes.

⁷⁴ Ghana Highway Study, interim Report Appendixes, C1, C2, C3.

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid

and people and consequently for systemic political, economic, and social development. Even though by 1960 there were two companies, Ghana Tyre Services Ltd in Accra and Vacu-Lug (WA) Ltd. in Sekondi which were listed in the directory of enterprises in Ghana to have been active in the manufacture of tyres and inner tubes. These companies were in reality specialised in tyre rethreading and related services and seem not to have had the capacity to serve Ghana's tyre demand.⁷⁷ For instance, in 1964 the lack of spare parts and tyres for vehicles hindered the relocation of affected residents by the Volta River Authority during the implementation of the Volta River Project. Out of the 400 vehicles hired by the VRA only half of these were usable because there were no tyres or spare parts to get them repaired. Moreover, maintaining the VRA's own 100 vehicles was only successful after a frantic search for tyres and spares.⁷⁸ Thus with an expanding motor transport saddled with a tyre shortage, a tyre manufacturing factory needed to be considered in Nkrumah's industrial development project.

In a nut shell, the establishment of a local tyre manufacturing company in Ghana Bonsa Tyre Company was an attempt to harness local rubber resources for tyre manufacturing during the early 1960s. As an essential ingredient in tyre manufacturing rubber production had a foothold in the local economy since the 19th century, feeding into the global supply for rubber tyre manufacturing. The southwestern parts of Ghana, in particular, had proven most suitable for rubber cultivation therefore when feasibility studies showed quite accurately the possibility of a commercial scale production for export and most importantly for industrialization, it fitted neatly into Nkrumah's agro-industrialization plan to establish a local tyre manufacturing company in



⁷⁷ Directory of Enterprises, Government statistician's office (Accra: Ghana, February 1960), ii. These companies engaged in the process of tyre rethreading and related services for the reuse of worn-out tyres. The process involved removing the worn-out outer section of the tyre (thread) and reattaching a new fold for better tyre-to-road traction.

⁷⁸Rowena M. Lawson, An Interim Economic Appraisal of the Volta River Resettlement Scheme, University of Ghana Volta Basin Research Project Technical Report (Ghana,1966),6.

Ghana. Substantial effort was put first into commercial rubber cultivation intended to feed the tyre company by the beginning of its production as well as for export. It can thus be argued that though not at the same magnitude as in the nineteenth century, rubber had regained an important status; as a local resource serving as the basis for the establishment of Ghana's tyre company with its attendant ramifications for the transport industry after the 1966 coup.

An equally important development for the establishment of the Bonsa Tyre Company was the booming motor transport industry which had taken root in Ghana. Yet at its inception to the 1930s the industry had been constrained by tyre scarcity as a result of factors such as British rubber control strategy, and limited tyre imports due to unsuitable for local climatic conditions which affected tyres storage. From the 1960s the motor transport sector kept expanding yet the problem of shortage; of spare parts, fuel and most significantly tyres persisted. Eventually, by this time two tyre retreading companies, Ghana Tyre Services Ltd in Accra and Vacu-Lug (WA) Ltd in Sekondi were providing services for tyres and inner tubes. But in as much as these services may have played a significant role in keeping vehicles on the move they were largely inadequate in resolving the problem; the more reason for the government to invest rather in establishing the Bonsa Tyre Company was to cut down Ghana's tyre imports. The trajectory of the Bonsa Tyre Company however was significantly altered by the change of government leading to its sale to the Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company in 1967.

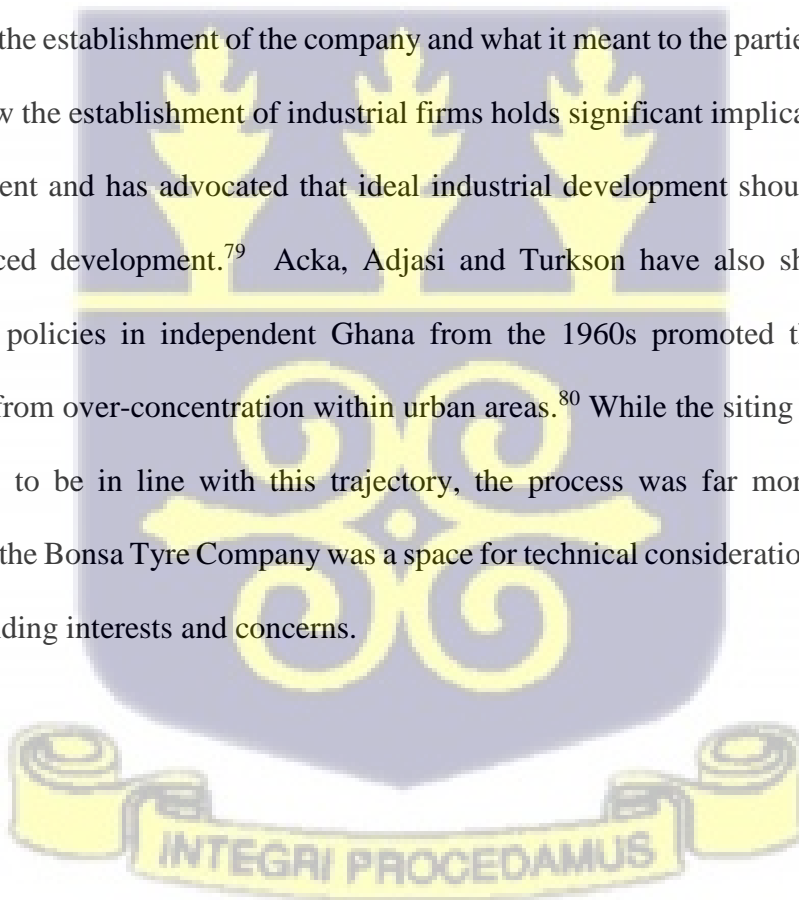


CHAPTER THREE

THE ORIGINS AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BONSA TYRE COMPANY 1957-1969.

Introduction

The establishment of a local tyre manufacturing factory in Ghana entailed several considerations but also attracted many interests and concerns. State Officials factored many considerations and concerns to ensure the establishment of the project and other interested parties related to the development of the company per their unique circumstances. This chapter discusses these key developments in the establishment of the Bonsel Tyre Company to highlight the undercurrents in the establishment of the company and what it meant to the parties involved. Ewusi has indicated how the establishment of industrial firms holds significant implications within areas of its establishment and has advocated that ideal industrial development should be dispersed to achieve a balanced development.⁷⁹ Ackah, Adjasi and Turkson have also shown that various industrialization policies in independent Ghana from the 1960s promoted the distribution of industries away from over-concentration within urban areas.⁸⁰ While the siting of the Bonsel Tyre Company seems to be in line with this trajectory, the process was far more complex; the establishment of the Bonsel Tyre Company was a space for technical considerations and practicality as well as contending interests and concerns.



⁷⁹ Ewusi, *The Process of Industrialization*, 1-99.

⁸⁰ Ackah, Adjasi, and Turkson, *Scooping study on the evolution of industry*, 1-39.

Bonsa Tyre Company – The Antecedents

In the early 1950s, there were considerable changes in Ghana's political landscape which had repercussions on the political economy. Kwame Nkrumah became the Leader of government Business in 1951 and later in 1957 the prime minister of the newly independent nation. Arguably, the early 1950s could be said to have been generally prosperous, yet by the late 1950s, Ghana's economy, according to Tony Killick:

still bore the hallmark of colonization...It was still essentially a rural economy, with more than half its GDP originating in agricultural and related activities. It was a classic case of an open economy, heavily dependent on international commerce. Trade and payments were largely unregulated and tariff levels were generally low. Most capital goods and many kinds of consumer goods had to be imported, and exports were dominated by cocoa which was highly volatile but generally provided about three-fifths of total foreign exchange earnings.⁸¹

The Nkrumah administration sought to change the economy from its colonial structure. So, from 1957 Nkrumah's economic policy was centred on a vision of economic modernization: the "great push" principally involving a significant investment effort, a plan centred around an industrialization drive, emphasizing import substitution, structural change, and a less open economy, to be mostly implemented by the state.⁸² Motor vehicle tyres were one of these imports to be manufactured locally particularly to resolve the nagging problem of tyre shortage which characterised the motor transport sector. For this reason, the government took steps during the 1950s through investments in rubber production with an intent to produce enough latex to feed an intended tyre manufacturing industry that was earmarked to be established later.

⁸¹ Tony Killick, *Development Economics in Action A study of economic policies in Ghana* (Routledge: New York, 2010), 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2.

The establishment of a local rubber tyre manufacturing factory in Ghana was thus preceded by an investment in the needed raw materials to ensure the availability of raw rubber for the tyre manufacturing factory. Indeed, the Gold Coast Industrial Development Corporation recruited a consultant in 1956 to investigate the feasibility of rubber production and manufacturing. At the end, the rainy, forested parts of south-western Ghana was the optimal location for rubber tree cultivation.⁸³ Consequently, when Ghana eventually attained independence in 1957, Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) government keenly focused on rubber cultivation as part of efforts to diversify the cash crop economy and boost its industrialisation agenda. Already abreast with the country's overdependence on imports, the CPP government made a substantial investment to develop other crops for export and to feed state-owned import substitution industries to cut down its imports.

The government thus intended to establish a rubber tyre manufacturing factory to resolve the tyre shortage within the expanding local motor transport economy in Ghana. In this bid to meet local requirements, wider consultations had to be made. For instance, the Ministry of Industries sought the expert opinion of a Chief Transport Officer of the Government Transport Department on the type of tyre sizes the factory should consider in its production agenda to suit local demands.⁸⁴ The Chief Transport Officer recommended that a total of 450 daily outputs of various sizes of tyres be considered.

In 1957, the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC), together with a Danish firm, R. T. Briscoe, started a 5,000-acre Rubber Estate at Dixcove in the Western region and by 1961

⁸³ Lambert, *Tapping Ghanaians*, 2.

⁸⁴ GH/PRAAD/ RG /7/1/1638, Letter from Chief Transport officer to Ministry of industries dated 18th July 1962 titled Proposed Rubber Tire Factory.

about 2,140 acres were planted.⁸⁵ R.T. Briscoe owned 51 percent of the company, while the government held the remaining 49 percent. However, three years later, in 1960, the plantation was nationalized, and its management was taken over by the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC), which was founded to monitor the state's plantations and promote cash crops including rubber.

The Agricultural Development Corporation started large-scale rubber cultivation around Abura, in the Western Region. In 1962 the ADC was merged with a larger entity, the State Farms Corporation (SFC).⁸⁶ The mandate of the SFC was clearly stated in the seven-year development plan for 1963 to 1970; the SFC was to play a leading role in the production of sugarcane, cotton, rubber, and non-apparel fibre in areas suitable for large-scale production.⁸⁷ In 1959 the government embarked on a rubber expansion programme and by 1964 about 2,769 hectares of rubber were planted. In addition, the State Farms Corporation planted 3,739 hectares of new rubber on a 16,200-hectare concession it acquired. The target was to plant about 15,920 hectares by 1966.⁸⁸

The effort to produce rubber on an industrial scale was not limited only to the plantations of the Agricultural Development Corporation and the State Farm Corporation but included organising smallholder farmers into cooperatives to produce rubber. In 1961, President Nkrumah organised and urged chiefs and farmers at Nsein in the Western Region to engage in rubber production to increase production by setting up cooperatives. Later, the initiative was extended to other parts of the Central, Eastern, and Ashanti Regions. Under the 'cooperative' umbrella, farmers

⁸⁵ Marvin P. Miracle and Ann Seidman, *State farms in Ghana* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1968), 9. R.T Briscoe was a multinational vehicle assembly firm which had established a base in Ghana.

⁸⁶ Abura is in the Ahanta West Municipality of the Western region, along the Agona-Elubo road

⁸⁷ Marvin P. Miracle and Ann Seidman, *State farms in Ghana*, 4.

⁸⁸ Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana*, 84.

planted about 3500 acres of rubber trees.⁸⁹ It should be mentioned that earlier in the mid-1950s over 100,000 acres of land around the Bonsa area in the Western Region had been acquired and planting had proceeded rapidly. By the mid-1960s, about 20,000 acres had been planted. Because rubber takes 7-8 years to grow, it was not expected to be available for harvesting until 1967, after which mature rubber would be harvested to coincide with the commencement of manufacturing by the tyre firm.⁹⁰

As indicated already, the establishment of a tyre manufacturing industry was an integral part of Nkrumah's rubber scheme. The plan was to set up a state-owned tyre factory at Bonsaso with assistance from Czechoslovakia. In December 1961, the Industrial Development Corporation (I.D.C.) and Techno-Export of Praha, Czechoslovakia, signed a contract for the supply of machinery and equipment for a complete factory under an Economic Cooperation Agreement between Ghana and Czechoslovakia, which provided for very easy repayment terms for Czech loans.⁹¹

Siting the Tyre Company

The construction of the Bonsa Tyre Company began in 1963. But before the construction of the tyre company, the government had to decide on a suitable location for the establishment of the firm. Many sites including Kumasi, Hemang, and Bonsaso among other areas were surveyed to determine their suitability for the project.⁹² The government initially considered setting up the company at Kumasi but this plan was abolished because it was too far away from the source of

⁸⁹Emmanuel Akwasi Owusu and François Ruf, "From Firestone to Michelin, a History of Rubber Cultivation, 179-181."

⁹⁰ Sawyerr, *Multinational corporations and development*, 270.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/ 1832, Bonsaso Rubber Plant confidential 1961-62. The names of the other seven areas are not disclosed in the records.

raw material (rubber). Again, there were concerns about access to water supply which was needed for a hydro-powered factory system. Another area which was suggested was Hemang near Prestea. The Ministry of Industries indicated that locating the factory near Hemang should be given priority because a hydroelectric project was earmarked to be established by the Czech in the area. Again, this location was more promising and was considered for several reasons. First, it was close to a railway line. Second, it was closer to the raw rubber supply to be produced at Anyinase. It also had a good road network and was quite close to the Ankobra River and finally, it was close to the Takoradi Harbour.⁹³

Reasons that may have made the area a priority was that rubber farmers in Prestea had been demanding through the Western Regional Commissioner for the establishment of a rubber processing factory at Prestea. Subsequently, arrangements were initiated for the establishment of a million-pound rubber processing factory. In 1962, the Ministry of Industries had arranged for experts from Poland to inspect a proposed site for the project but this plant was never implemented because of the tyre factory.

An inspection of the Hemang site for the tyre factory done by experts made up of members from the Ministry of Industry, Lands Department, and Ghana Architecture and Civil Engineering Company revealed several issues. The chosen area, which was between the Ankobra River and Heman was likely to be flooded during the rainy season. Moreover, the site would require a road and bridge to be constructed over the Asesere River (a tributary of the Ankobra) should the project be located at Heman. At the same time, an access road to the construction of a bridge over the Ankobra to replace the Prestea ferry would pass exactly through the site.⁹⁴ Thus conditions at the Hemang site made it unsuitable for the establishment of the factory.

⁹³ Ibid, Minutes of the meeting held on the 16th December 1961 in connection with the Rubber Tyre factory, 11-15.

⁹⁴ Ibid, Report about the inspection tour to the area of Prestea for the allocation of Rubber Tyre Factory, 27-28.

However, later inspection of other sites including Bona by a team of Czech experts and one Mister Agyei-Gyamfi of the Ghana Architectural and Civil Engineering Company recommended the siting of the factory at Bonsaso. Bonsaso was chosen for several qualities which the other sites lacked. These included the following: sufficient land for the factory and its possible extensions; The land was quite level grounded not mountainous or hilly; proximity to the Bona River which had sufficient water levels throughout the year; good road and closeness to Tarkwa railway and Takoradi harbour; situated in the area of rubber plantations/production; the absence of any industry in the area meant a sufficient pool of labour reserve for the factory.⁹⁵

Most importantly because tyre manufacturing produced a lot of heat it required sufficient quantities of water to cool down the machines and the Bona River sufficed as the ideal river for the project. Certainly, the high cost of transport of raw materials would increase production costs and have to be minimized as much as possible. And closeness to the Tarkwa railway and Tarkoradi harbour would facilitate quick transport of imported material needed for the construction of the company and in the long term, other imports needed to run the production as well as for the export of excess rubber and tyres. So, on 16th July 1962, Bonsaso was approved by the Ministry of Industry as the chosen site for the establishment of the rubber tyre company.⁹⁶ Once the Bonsaso site had been approved for the establishment of a rubber tyre factory all plans for a rubber processing plant at Prestea were dropped. This was because the Ministry of Industries intended that the tyre factory was to be fed by raw rubber supplied by rubber cooperative farms in the Western Region including Prestea.⁹⁷ This move was also to curtail once and for all, the persistent demands from the people of Prestea through the Regional Commissioner.

⁹⁵Ibid,71.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 77, letter from the Ministry of Industry to Technoexport dated 16th July 1962 confirming the approval of the Bonsaso site by the ministry.

⁹⁷PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/ 1832, Bonsaso Rubber Plant, 84, 114-115.

From the above, it is clear that the technical considerations and economic practicality trumped all other considerations for the siting of the Bona Tyre Company. Yet, this also hints at how geographical conditions such as the nature of the land and closeness to the Bona River also played an important role in dictating the siting of the factory. It suffices then that even though it may be argued that industrial development should be one of dispersal intending to achieve balanced development as mentioned by Ewusi, the siting of Ghana's rubber tyre factory shows the complex currents that shape this process.⁹⁸ It was dependent on technical and practical considerations on how the intended location was suitable for the intended project.

Establishing the Factory

After the inspection of the Bonsaso site, the chief of Bonsaso Nana Atakora Koi III sent a letter to the Minister of Industries, Mr Imoro Egala assuring him of his legitimacy as the chief and the “only true and undisputed owner of the area concerned” and made an offer of land “free of charge to the state” as his contribution to the economic development of Ghana.⁹⁹ Nana Atakora Koi III donated a land area covering about 21.86 Acres (see Figure 3) for the construction of the factory to the government.¹⁰⁰

The initial construction of the Bona Tyre Company was begun by a Czech company, called Technoexports but various aspects of the construction such as steel structures were outsourced to various local Ghanaian construction companies as a way of ensuring local

⁹⁸ Ewusi, *The Process of Industrialization in Ghana*, 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/774 Rubber Tyre Factory, Bonsaso, 53; PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/1832 Bonsaso Rubber Plant, 75-76. In a letter from Nana Atakora Koi III to Imoro Egala Esqr. Minister of industries the chief affirmed that he has been approached by a team of Czech engineers concerning the choosing of a site near his village and confirmed his ownership of the chosen site as well as making an offer of the land to the state as his contribution to the economic development of the Ghana. He however indicated that other areas covering the Staff Resident and the rest of the Land for any other purposes were to be acquired separately and at a cost.

involvement. Local involvement also included labourers who were hired for various casual works such as providing security and clearing areas for building storage sheds, and local artisans such as carpenters and masons. There was also community participation in the form of provision of communal labour by residents of Bonsaso and neighbouring communities such as Dompim and Simpa with the help of the chief of Bonsaso during the initial processes of setting up the firm.¹⁰¹

The chief also took up other supervisory responsibilities. According to Lambert, "...as construction of the factory commenced, Nana Atakora voluntarily supervised the work to ensure that the equipment was being stored securely and that labourers were paid fair wages on time (even if it meant paying them himself)."¹⁰² Eventually, for his effort, the chief was put on the Ministry of Industry's payroll. In the face of land appropriation by the State Farm Corporation in the Western region for Nkrumah's rubber scheme and the tactics employed by some chiefs and farmers, Lambert doubts the actions of Nana Atakora and consequently describes his actions as self-serving.

Undeniably, the period right after colonialism was quite unsettling for the chiefs and their control of land in Ghana. After colonial rule, the Nkrumah government began an ambivalent attempt to curb the power of chiefs by targeting their main source of revenue, land. But this effort coopted chiefs who were inclined toward the CPP and rather targeted chiefs who supported the opposition. Eventually, this attempt led to the vesting of the privileges of chiefs in the hands of the government giving it the power to manage the natural resources of traditional authorities on behalf of chiefs.¹⁰³ Nkrumah's policies aimed to transfer control over land management from traditional chiefs to the state. For instance, he implemented the Ashanti Stool Lands Act of 1958 and the

¹⁰¹ PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/1686 Rubber Tyre Factory, 913.

¹⁰² Lambert, *Tapping Ghanaians*, 19.

¹⁰³ Amanor, *Land Administration, Chiefs and Governance in Ghana*.

Akim Abuakwa (Stool Revenue) Act 78 of 1958, which vested ownership of land in the state. These acts gave the state a managerial role while the chiefs continued to receive the benefits of the land. The acts merely redistributed power from the chiefs to the state.¹⁰⁴ In 1962 the government of Ghana took on a larger role in local government administration and passed laws allowing the state to manage the revenue generated from stool lands. The Administration of Lands Act of 1962 (Act 123) granted the Minister responsible for Lands the authority to collect and distribute stool land revenues in a prescribed manner.¹⁰⁵ This responsibility was carried out by the Lands Department. As a result of these changes, the traditional chiefs' role in managing stool land and its revenue was reduced.

In this particular situation, it appears reasonable to make the case that a concealed and "self-serving" attempt was made by the chief of Bonsaso to pursue an interest aimed at protecting his control over the land. However, in September 1966 when the CPP government was ousted Nana Atakora reoffered the land to the NLC regime and subsequently requested payment of the compensation previously owed him for food crops and cash crops which were cleared for the construction of the factory and bungalows.¹⁰⁶ An assessment of the crops indicated the value of the crops at ₵ 6050.93.¹⁰⁷ The records indicate payment was made in December 1966 by the Ministry of Industries. In this light, it is not wholly accurate to portray a self-serving narrative to placate the Nkrumah regime.

The initial plan was for the tyre factory to be ready by 1964, however, by the close of 1964 only the land had been cleared. By 1965, just a fraction of the machines purchased from the Czechs

¹⁰⁴ Obeng-Odoom, Franklin. "Understanding land reform in Ghana: A critical postcolonial institutional approach." *Review of Radical Political Economics* 48, no. 4 (2016), 667.

¹⁰⁵ Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands, "About Us; Background." *OASL*. Accessed December 21, 2022. <https://oasl.gov.gh/about-us/>

¹⁰⁶ PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/774 Rubber Tyre Factory, Bonsaso.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

had reached Bonsaso, while other equipment was being held by customs in Takoradi, and still more remained in rented storage facilities in Czechoslovakia. Several sheds had been built to protect the equipment which was successfully transported to Bonsaso. Others that had no suitable place of storage had second-hand roofing sheets erected under the supervision of Nana Atakora to protect them from the rains.¹⁰⁸ These challenges were due apparently to the fact that during this period most of the industries begun by Nkrumah had become quite a drain on the economy and bureaucratic inefficiencies, including delays in securing adequate credit and import licenses, had become a hindrance.¹⁰⁹

By May 1965 construction of the factory building was proceeding steadily but the initial construction of the factory excluded the provision of accommodation for staff. This was because the initial focus was to complete the establishment of the factory itself before considering other necessities such as accommodation. However, when it became apparent that accommodation for staff could not be delayed for later, the regional office of the Ministry of Industries was tasked to arrange the acquisition of an area on the site to include the staff accommodation. Prioritizing accommodation at this point seemed crucial for several reasons, first, it would minimize commuting time and cost for staff to ensure their availability for work during initial operations and when full production begins. Again, providing accommodation as part of the employment package would be a significant factor in attracting and retaining skilled workers.

The Bonsaso site had a few shortfalls; there was no electricity or pipe-borne water, and the only source of water was the Bansa River. Indeed the distribution of electric power for “rapid industrialization” from the national grid was meant to connect the major towns and mines of

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹Lambert, Tapping Ghanaians, 22; Hart, Ghana on the Go, 129.

southern Ghana not for domestic purposes.¹¹⁰ By 1962 Ghana relied on diesel-powered plants as its main sources of electricity and was awaiting the completion of the Volta River hydropower project. Meanwhile, the diesel power supply was channeled to mining areas and urban centres where government offices, workshops, hospitals, railways, and harbours, among others where essential public services were to be provided and rural areas were yet to be considered.¹¹¹ The Bonsa area was rural and therefore had no access to electricity by the time the factory was being set up. To resolve this challenge the government signed an agreement with Technoexports to supply a diesel-powered plant in 1965 at 197,800 Ghana Pounds.¹¹² What prompted this arrangement was the uncertainty of power supply from the Volta grid at the initial stage to the factory. It was also considered that having a power plant that would serve as a backup power supply to forestall possible power cuts would be important for smooth production.¹¹³

Realizing these shortfalls, in July 1965 there was a tempting but late appeal from the African Manganese Company Limited proposing the siting of the rubber factory at Nsuta in the Wassa area (see figure 3). It was most likely the African Manganese Company sought to generate revenue from the government's purchase or hiring of the facilities. This new site had a village capable of housing 1,500 families; with drainage, pipe-borne water and electricity. It was also situated along the Takoradi- Kumasi railway and main road. The company recognized however that this request was too late since the Bonsa project was far ahead and recommended the

¹¹⁰ Stephan F. Miescher and Dzodzi Tsikata. "Hydro-Power and the Promise of Modernity and Development in Ghana: Comparing the Akosombo and Bui Dam Projects." *Ghana Studies* 12, no.1 (2009), 15-53.

¹¹¹ PRAAD-Accra RG 1/2/162 Report on the establishment of a Steelworks in Ghana 1962.

¹¹² PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/ 1686, Rubber Tyre Factory, 815.

¹¹³By 1967 the company was certain of secured power from the Volta grid. Once this was achieved even the prospect of having the plant as a backup generator was abandoned. The NLC government eventually asked the Czech export firm to cancel the supply of the diesel plant. By the time of its production in 1969, the Bonsa Tyre Company was successfully connected to the national grid via the Tarkwa substation.

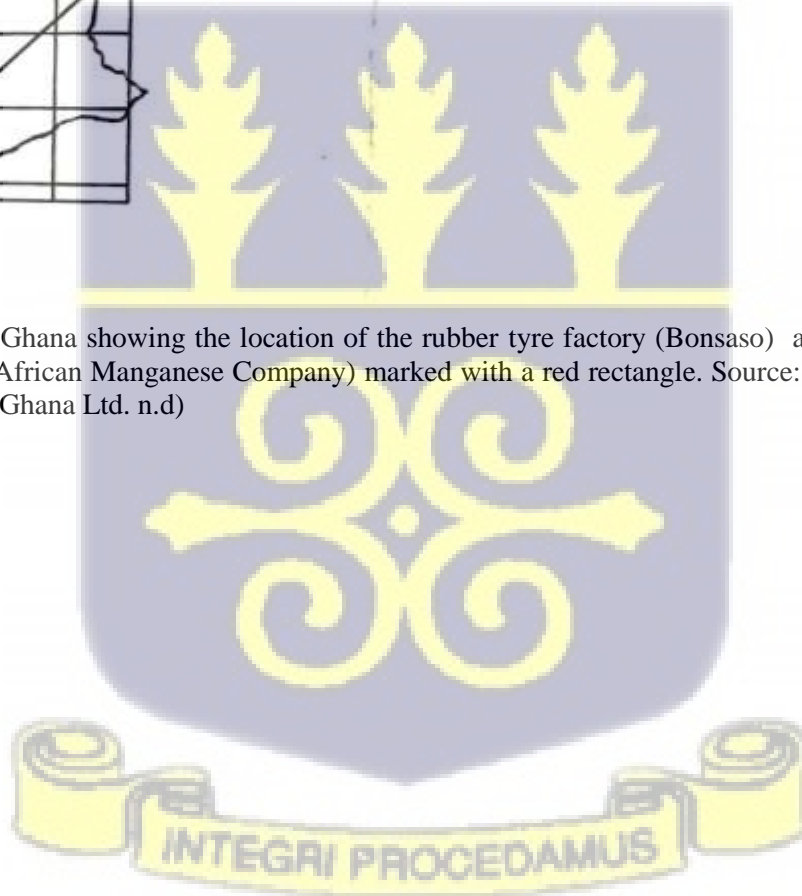
government should consider the said location for future industrial development.¹¹⁴ It is not clear exactly how the government responded to this request but work proceeded at the Bonsa site as planned. Apparently to abandon all the work done for the previous two years for a new site would have been a waste of resources and so economic expediency had to prevail. However, it is important to note how the African Manganese Company used this as an opportunity to draw the government's attention to possible industrial development in the Nsuta area.



¹¹⁴ PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/ 1686, Rubber Tyre Factory, Letter from The Africana Manganese Company limited ministry of industries dated 26th July 1965, 927.



Figure 3. Map of Ghana showing the location of the rubber tyre factory (Bonsaso) and Nsuta (location suggested by the African Manganese Company) marked with a red rectangle. Source: Firestone in Ghana (Accra: Firestone Ghana Ltd. n.d)



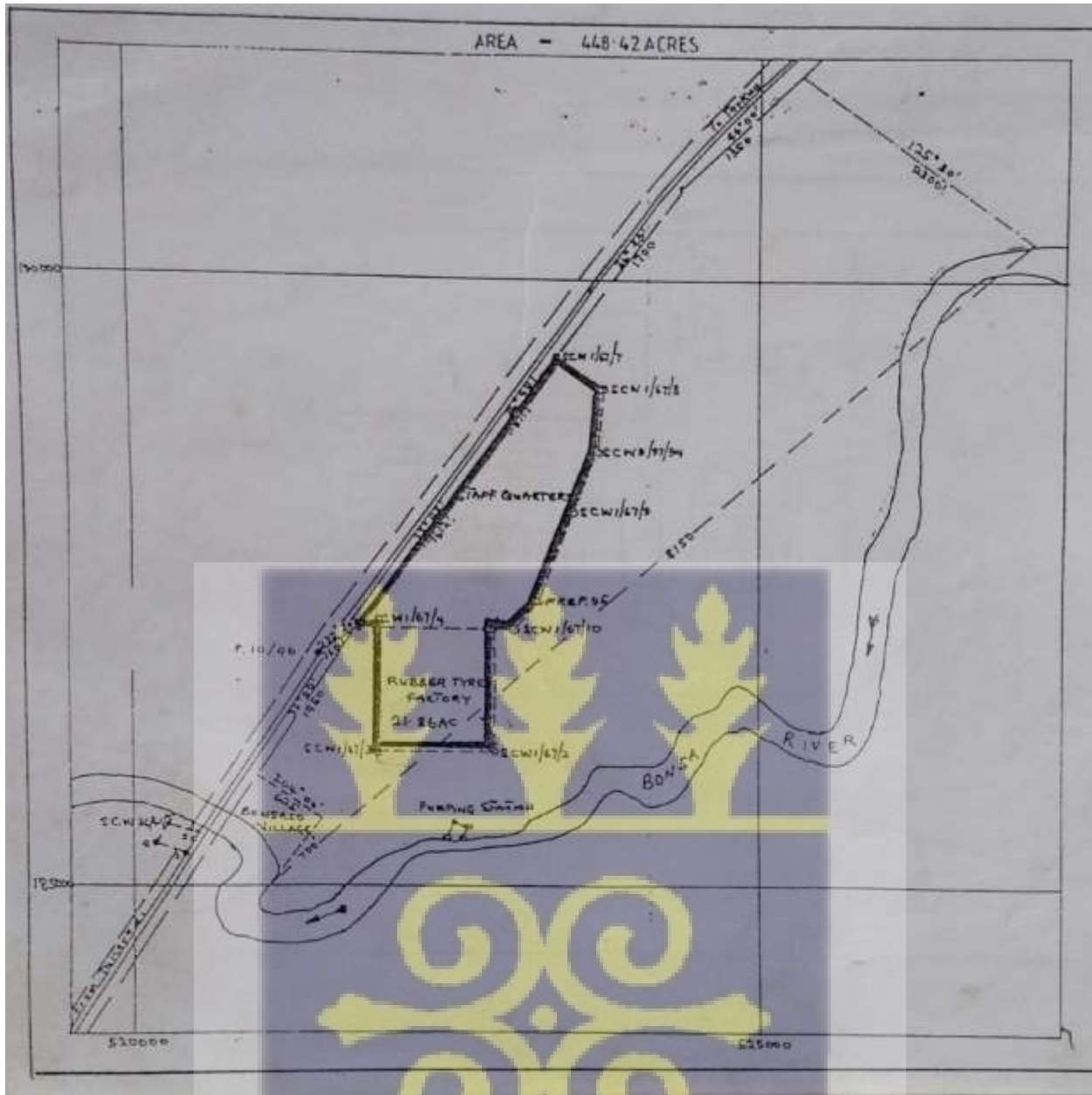


Figure 4. Plan site showing the land area of the factory and staff residence marked with deep-black lines in proximity to the Bonsaso community marked in short dashes. Source: Barnicon Property Valuation and Consultancy Services, "Valuation Report on Assets of Bonsa Tyre Company Limited," vol. 1 (Accra, Ghana, 2003). Obtained from Mr. Opoku Mensah, a former worker of the Bonsa Tyre Company.

A New Deal: The Firestone Company

The construction of the tyre factory was still in progress by 1966 until the coup that ousted the Nkrumah government resulted in a significant change in the process.¹¹⁵ The NLC held firmly on the neoliberal principle that the state should keep out of such activities as agriculture, industry and commerce.¹¹⁶ Coupled with an underpinning ideological position to directly counter any feature associated with the Nkrumah regime, the NLC began a withdrawal of the state from industrial activity by selling off as many of the state-owned enterprises and inviting private participation in, and control over, as many of the remainders, as possible. Consequently, the Bona Tyre Company was offered to Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio in 1967. The takeover agreement was a joint venture between Firestone (60%) and the Government of Ghana (40%).¹¹⁷ From this period the tyre factory was registered as Firestone Ghana Limited. Under the agreement signed between Firestone and Ghana in 1967, the joint ownership, and financial agreement among other conditions were clearly in favour of the expatriate firm. For instance, Ghana agreed to sell land, buildings, equipment, and machinery of the project at a lower price except that Firestone would bear all risk and cost associated with the machines. The government also agreed to complete all buildings that were in the course of construction on the land at its own expense by 1967.¹¹⁸

This poor deal sometimes elicited backlash from the public. For instance, one Kojo Mensah of Takoradi questioned the Firestone intent to withdraw from the joint agreement in 1980 “Is this,

¹¹⁵ *Daily Graphic*, “£5m Czech factory for Ghana”, August 23, 1961. Under the agreement which was signed at Prague between the government of Ghana and Czech Government, several factories including the tyre, sugar and shoe factories were to be established for Ghana over a period of five years.

¹¹⁶ Friedrich Elbert Foundation and Parliament of Republic of Ghana, *Privatization of State-Owned Enterprises in Ghana* (Accra, 1994), 14; Sawyer, *Multinational corporations and development*, 274.

¹¹⁷ ADB report, 1. It was in 1981 when the company was registered as Bona Tyre Company Limited with the Government as a 100 % shareholder up-to-date. Prior to this the company was called Firestone Ghana Ltd.

¹¹⁸ RG 1/ 2/163, Republic of Ghana and Firestone Tyre and rubber Company Master Agreement.

not the company we are made to believe that has a master agreement which is unfair to Ghana?”¹¹⁹ Ghana's weak bargaining position was the main factor in the poor deal it got in the joint agreement. The government's unstable post-coup administration and its belief that the state should not be involved in running industrial and commercial operations made it unable to negotiate effectively. Additionally, the government's emphasis on the defects and problems of the enterprises on the market, as well as its fixation on obtaining Western capital, gave the appearance of a "closing down" sale, resulting in lower prices for the enterprises being sold.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, once the agreement had been concluded, by March 1969 the factory had been successfully set up and was expected to go into production later that year (Figure 5).



¹¹⁹ “Here are the facts About Firestone”, Ghanaian Times, November 11, 1980

¹²⁰ Sawyerr, *Multinational Corporations and Development*, 282. The termination of the Czech arrangement marks contending economic policy in Ghana during this period. This was closely tied to the larger geopolitical tensions of the Cold War and the development of the Bansa Tyre Company reflects this. Nkrumah, had adopted socialist ideologies in the 1960s, established closer ties with pro-socialist/communist countries including Czechoslovakia which partnered to establish the Bansa Tyre Company. However, after the CIA-backed coup that brought the National Liberation Council (NLC) to power, the NLC sought to sever all communist/socialist ties and this meant terminating the Ghana-Czech agreement on the tyre company. It then entered into an agreement with the Firestone Rubber and Tyre Company from Akron, Ohio, USA. This shift in alliances reflects the broader political context of the time, with the contestation of economic policies being closely tied to the contestation of ideologies during the Cold War.



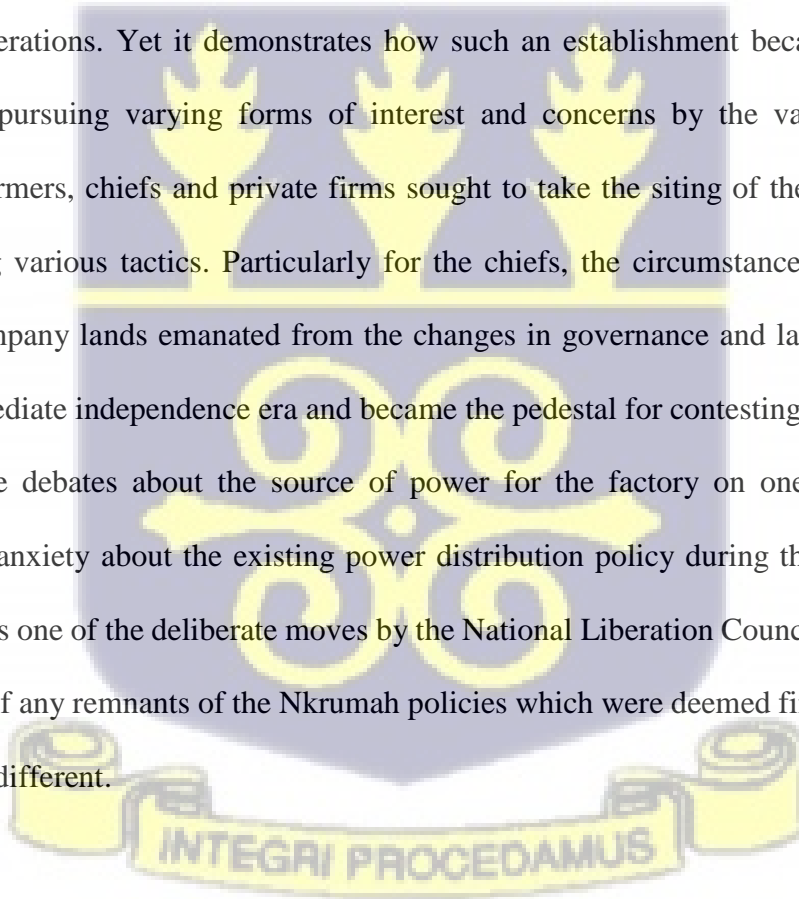
Figure 5. A presentation of the first tyre sample to the commissioner of industries, J.V. L Philips. Sources: Ghanaian Times, Wednesday, March 12, 1969.

Nevertheless, while the government failed to make a better deal, some chiefs in the Western region were not willing to become victims of the circumstance. The NLC era witnessed a protest by some chiefs on whose land the company was to operate compelling the Firestone Company to pay compensation. Various chiefs who had a stake in the stool lands within which the company's operations were established protested the transfer of land to Firestone.¹²¹ In May 1971 in a resolution, the chiefs requested that the government should review and nullify the concession agreement with the Firestone company because a total of about 118,000 acres of stool land had been leased to the company for about 50 years without the knowledge and consent of the chiefs

¹²¹ This appears to have been various lands on which the rubber plantations were established.

and people.¹²² Consequently, in 1973 Firestone began payment of compensation to the owners of the stool lands. A total sum of 108,000 cedis was paid to six stools including Bamiankor, Nsuaem, Nsein, Lower Axim and Lower and Upper Dixcove. It was estimated that a total of 1,700,000 cedis would be paid as compensation over ten years.¹²³ Thus given the changing governance landscape and land reforms, these chiefs were better placed to lay claim to the administration and appropriation of the lands to protect their interest, extract revenue and protest the government's actions on the lands transferred to Firestone Ghana Limited.

The siting and establishment of the Bona Tyre Company as indicated in this chapter was characterized by various considerations but the selection of the site was largely based on technical considerations. Yet it demonstrates how such an establishment became a conduit for expressing and pursuing varying forms of interest and concerns by the various groups and stakeholders. Farmers, chiefs and private firms sought to take the siting of the tyre company in their areas using various tactics. Particularly for the chiefs, the circumstances surrounding the Bona Tyre Company lands emanated from the changes in governance and land reforms dating back to the immediate independence era and became the pedestal for contesting how the land was put to use. The debates about the source of power for the factory on one level reflect the uncertainty and anxiety about the existing power distribution policy during the period. On the other hand, it was one of the deliberate moves by the National Liberation Council to rid the Bona Tyre Company of any remnants of the Nkrumah policies which were deemed financially unsound or ideologically different.



¹²² O. G. Hughes, "Chief Paid C 108,000 by Firestone", *Ghanaian Times*, May 15, 1973.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER FOUR

THE OPERATION OF THE BONSA TYRE COMPANY.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the operation of the Bansa Tyre Company from the beginning of its production to its total shutdown in 2000. It discusses the socio-economic and political circumstances within which the Bansa Tyre Company operated. It also highlights some key developments which contributed to the decline and eventual collapse of the firm. William Steel's study demonstrates that Ghana adopted policies aimed at industrialization and at replacing imports with domestic production but it ran into balance-of-payments challenges. This became an important constraint and Import Substitution industries experienced stagnation and under-utilization of capacity.¹²⁴ Similarly, Adei has rightly emphasised, that the lack of technological capacity among other shortfalls such as the lack of foreign currency affected the company and contributed largely to its decline.¹²⁵ Hart has also characterised the motor transport industry as an industry of scarcity and tyre scarcity as greatly inimical to the motor transport industry.¹²⁶ This begs the question in this circumstance what was the position of the Bansa Tyre company in the motor transport industry? This chapter shows that indeed multiple challenges such as difficulty in obtaining sufficient import licenses for raw material as a result of depleted foreign exchange, internal managerial challenges, and incomplete rehabilitation, however the Bansa Tyre Company had become an intricate part of the remedy to the tyre problem such that it could not be shut down until the 2000s where it had become largely irrelevant.

¹²⁴ Steel. Import Substitution and Excess Capacity in Ghana, 212-240.

¹²⁵ Adei, Technological Capacity, 1504-1506.

¹²⁶ Hart, *Ghana on the go*, 129, 145.

Tyre Production, Distribution and Sales

In 1969 the company started production as Firestone Ghana Limited (see Fig. 6 for the first locally manufactured tyre in Ghana).



Figure 6. First Locally manufactured tyre in Ghana by Firestone Ghana Limited. Source: Museum of Science and Technology, Accra, Ghana.

The Bansa Tyre Company consistently increased its tyre production from the beginning of its production and exceeded the production capacity of 4200 tyres in 1977. From 1970 to 1976 (see Figure 7), the average production over the six years was approximately 310,422 units of tyres per year. Therefore although production was below its full capacity, there was a continuous annual increase in production until it finally exceeded full capacity in 1977. By the 1970s the Bansa Tyre Company produced about 94% of Ghana's tyre supply.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ *Ghanaian Times*, "Firestone in Ghana with Ghana", January 12, 1973.

The tyres were supplied through major distributary branches across the country with an initial 32 dealers, 27 direct heavy consumers and 14 vehicle assembly plants.¹²⁸ By the late 1970s, it had about 87 certified tyre dealers spread across the nine regions of the country.¹²⁹

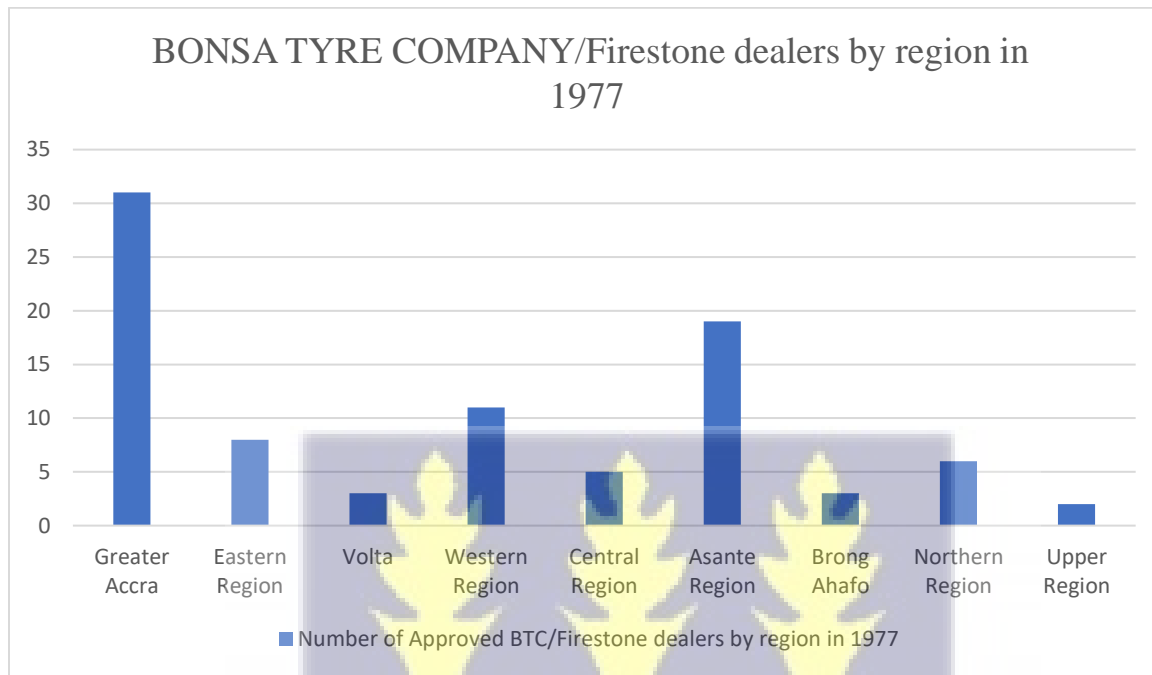


Figure 7. Source; *Daily Graphic* 1977.

The above distribution of Bonsa Tyre Company dealers across the country provides an overview of the level of expansion of the Bonsa Tyre Company market in the various regions of Ghana. This had several implications for Ghana’s motor transport industry. The increase in the number of certified tyre dealers over time (from the initial 32) indicates a growing demand for the product. This suggests that the tyres were well-received. Again, the engagement with various dealers, consumers, and assembly plants implies that the company had established strong networking and partnership relationships within the automotive ecosystem. For instance, the initial presence of 32 dealers, 27 direct heavy consumers, and 14 vehicle assembly plants indicates that

¹²⁸ *Firestone in Ghana*, n.d., 17.

¹²⁹ “Firestone Authorized Dealers”, *Daily Graphic*, June 6, 1977.

the company had successfully penetrated both the consumer and industrial markets. This emphasises the level of integration and centrality within Ghana's automotive industry during the period.

The company's expansive but uneven distribution of products and services across the country also speaks to the extensive economic and mobility pattern in Ghana. Major administrative and trade hubs such as Greater Accra and the Asante region had the highest number of dealers thus indicating how existing socio-economic and geographic configuration dictated the Bonsa Tyre Company's distribution. But most importantly it indicates the regional trends of mobilities in Ghana during the period. There were relatively higher levels of mobility of people, goods and services to the Accra, Asante and Western regions compared to the other regions. Consequently, more vehicles move to these regions, making the demand for pneumatic tyres in these regions higher as indicated by the number of tyre dealers in each region.¹³⁰

Decline, Rehabilitation and Collapse

By 1978, the Bonsa Tyre Company began to experience a marked decline in production from 554.858 during the previous year to 241.776. From 1978 there was a continuous downward spiral in production as shown in Fig. 7. It is also observed that total annual sales were higher than annual production indicating a high demand for Bonsa Tyre Company tyres by motorists from 1970 to 1975. There was also a significant drop in sales even in 1977 when production had

¹³⁰ Ntewusu has shown that the introduction and expansion of motor transport in the Gold coast (later Ghana) led to an increase in mobility of persons and goods, but most significantly it also led to population change, and urban expansion in Accra as it became increasingly interconnected with other parts of the country in terms of trade and migration. This was as a result of the development of various routes and distributive networks which facilitated the movement of people, goods and services to and from major towns across the regions of the country. The importance of these routes and distributive networks changed or continued as a result of varying socio-economic factors. see Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu, *settling in and holding on*, 119-134. Similarly, the Bonsa Tyre Company's distributive network mirrors the varying significance of the regional distributive networks during the period.

exceeded the production capacity of 4200 and the subsequent years also showed fluctuating but declining sales as production also faltered over the years (see details in Fig. 8).¹³¹

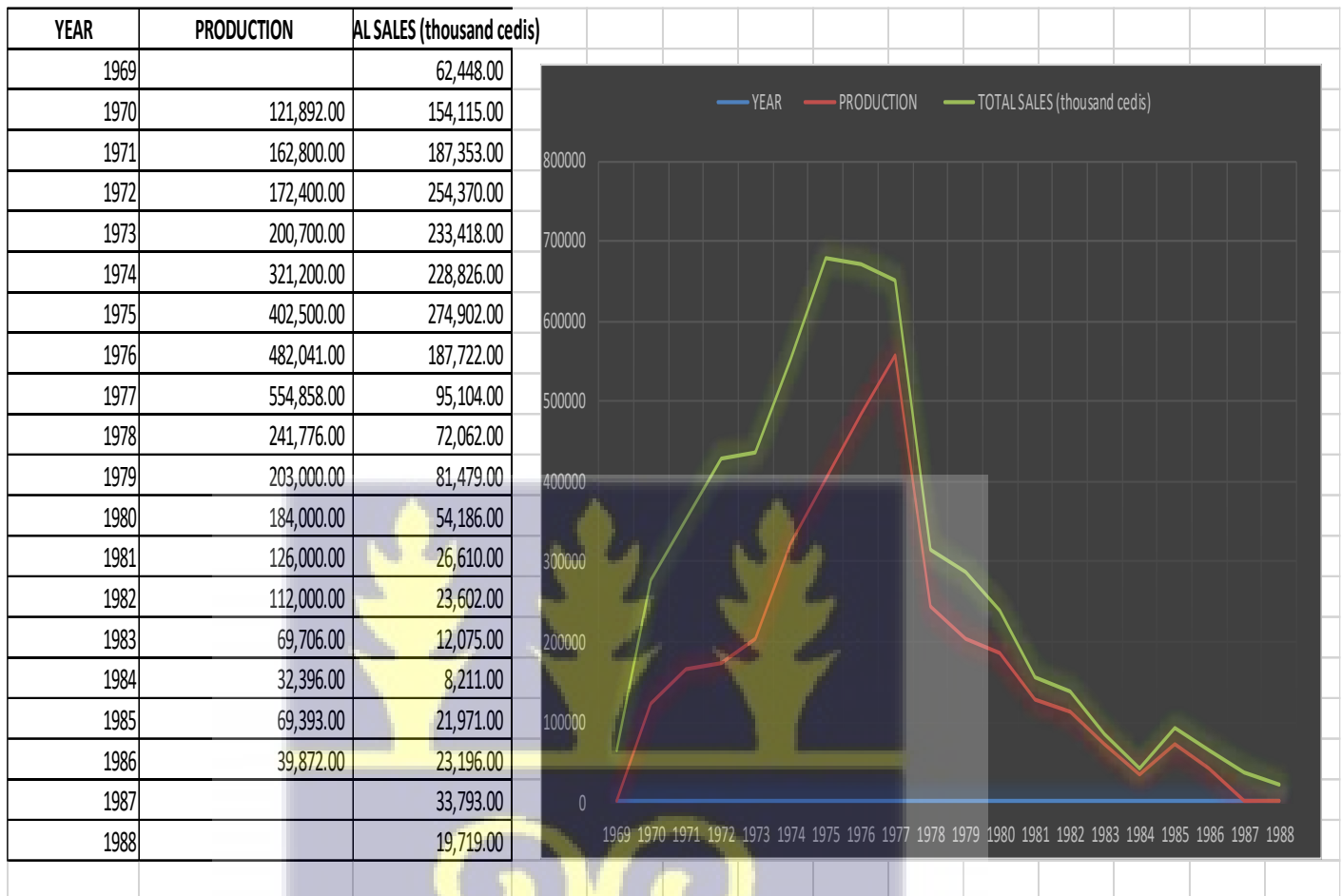


Figure 8. Bonsa Tyre Company Annual Production Versus Annual Total Sales. Source; Stephen Adei, “Technological Capacity and Aborted Industrialization in Ghana: The Case of the Bonsa Tyre Company.” *World Development* 18 no.11 (1990), 1504-1506.

William Steel has indicated that Ghana adopted policies aimed at industrialization and at replacing imports with domestic production but this ran into balance-of-payments problems so foreign exchange became a significant constraint, and import substitution industries experienced

¹³¹ It is important to note that total annual sale and total annual production can be quite misleading, given that the total annual sales were inclusive of sales of previous production as well as imports to supplement production. Nevertheless, fluctuating production and sales are indicative enough of the level of performance of the Bonsa Tyre Company to help explain some factors affecting demand for the company’s products by motorists.

stagnation and under-utilization of capacity. The Bonsa Tyre Company was severely affected by this situation in the late 1970s, contributing significantly to its decline.

Managers of the Bonsa Tyre Company kept lamenting that the short production and supply were a result of conditions beyond the control of management.¹³² This condition was the effect of the economic deterioration from 1970 and the impact it had on the running of the tyre company. This period saw severe foreign exchange shortage which meant that Ghana could not import the necessary spare parts and raw materials to maintain industrial production and equipment. Therefore industrial capacity utilization dropped to below 25 per cent.¹³³ Adei has elaborated on how this affected the company's ability to import the needed inputs for production.¹³⁴

It must be added that the sudden decline in production in 1978 was also a result of government actions in the heat of a shortage of foreign exchange. The Washington Post reported in 1979 in the previous year, the foreign exchange needed to import raw materials such as nylon fabric and synthetics was diverted to pay for food, oil and other items and so when the company needed to draw foreign exchange for payment of raw materials, the reserves were depleted.¹³⁵ The impact of this problem led to the staggering decline observed immediately after 1978 after the company had achieved its highest production even beyond capacity during the previous year. In 1978 the company had to temporarily suspend production and fell on the import of tyres to offset the drop in production. However, months later, on July 5, 1978, the company indicated it would begin full-scale production of tyres in the coming month. This was on account of the company having successfully established a letter of credit from the Bank of Ghana and since ordered raw

¹³² Pamidy Amoah, "Lorry tyres full scale production to begin next month", *Daily Graphic*, July 5, 1978.

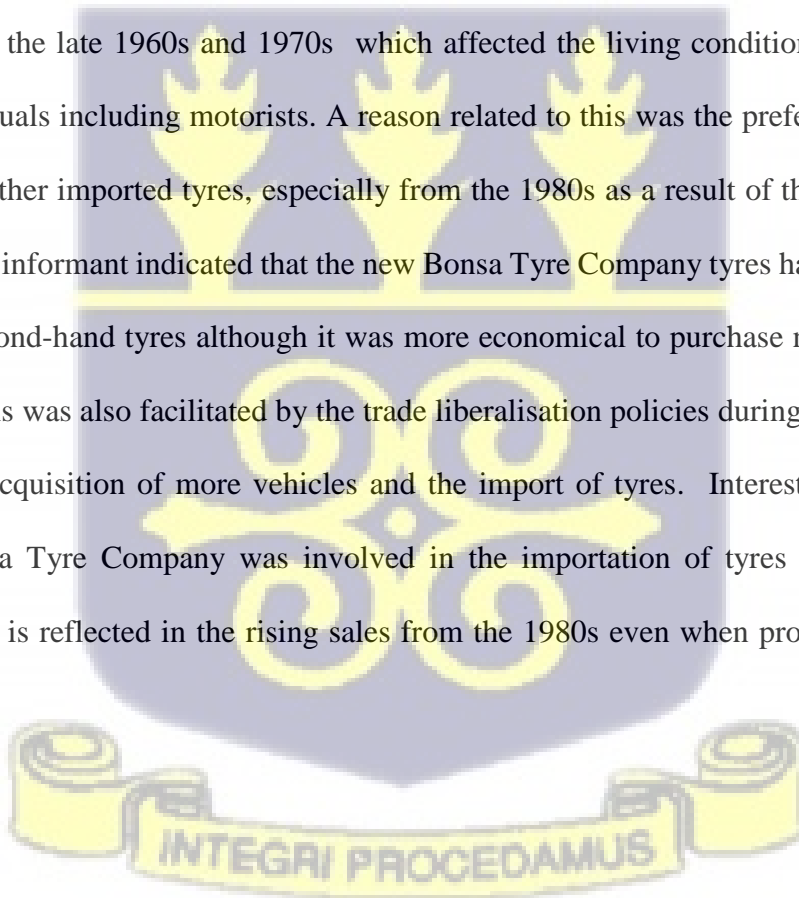
¹³³ Nii Kwaku Sowa, *Monetary control in Ghana 1957-1988*, Working paper, Overseas Development Institute, London: May 1991.

¹³⁴ Adei, *Technological Capacity*, 1507

¹³⁵ Dan Morgan, "Ghana Tire Operation Linked to Food Output", *The Washington Post*, March 7, 1979.

materials from Japan. It intended to double production from 30,000 to 60,000 when the raw materials arrived.¹³⁶ It can be observed from the annual production figures above that this objective was not achieved. This was because the situation did not improve even in the 1980s as the company was receiving a fraction of the hard currency allocation it had received in the 1970s.¹³⁷

What explains the wavering performance of the Bansa Tyre Company, and the fluctuating production and sales may also be explained by the socio-economic conditions of the 1970s and 80s and how it may have affected motorists. Among these was the economic strength of motorists to purchase locally manufactured tyres, particularly within the deteriorating economic conditions in Ghana during the late 1960s and 1970s which affected the living conditions and purchasing power of individuals including motorists. A reason related to this was the preference for second-hand tyres and other imported tyres, especially from the 1980s as a result of their comparatively lower prices. An informant indicated that the new Bansa Tyre Company tyres had higher prices as compared to second-hand tyres although it was more economical to purchase new tyres for their durability.¹³⁸ This was also facilitated by the trade liberalisation policies during this period which resulted in the acquisition of more vehicles and the import of tyres. Interestingly, during this period the Bansa Tyre Company was involved in the importation of tyres to supplement its production. This is reflected in the rising sales from the 1980s even when production was quite low.



¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ See Stephen Adei, "Technological Capacity and Aborted Industrialization in Ghana: The Case of Bansa Tyre Company", *World Development*, Vol.18 No.11. (1990): 1507, for detailed figures on the allocation of foreign exchange to the Bansa Tyre Company.

¹³⁸ Interview with Isaac Kojo Baah Takoradi, July 16,2022. Isaac has been driving since 1980.

The Bonsa Tyre Company also, advocated for motorists to use local retreading facilities including the company's retreading centres to refurbish worn-out tyres. The company had arranged for about 200,000 kilos of rubber to be purposely dedicated for retreading. Yet this remedy did not seem to receive enough patronage from motorists because much to the displeasure of management, motorists preferred imported retreaded tyres to using local retreading facilities for their out tyres. For instance, in 1978 Mr. J.M. Chouinard the sales director contended that if drivers and vehicle owners had adhered to the company's advice to use available retread facilities, the shortage of tyres and the parking of vehicles would not have happened.¹³⁹ Thus while the public pointed out the Bonsa Tyre Company as the cause of the shortage the company also blamed the motorist. It also shows how the preferences of motorists determined the line of action of the Bonsa Tyre Company in importing instead of falling on local remedies. Yet motorist choice was not without reason because the local retreading did not last long and the tread usually detached after a few months of use.¹⁴⁰

These measures could however not halt the decline of the company. The company's management began notifying employees of the "final and unconditional" termination of their employment which was to begin in 1980. It announced its intention to shut down its operation for an indefinite period in 1981. The government had agreed in 1980, to purchase Firestone's share because it was a necessary action to ensure the continued employment of workers of the company and most importantly to ensure continuity of reasonable supply of tyres on the market.¹⁴¹ The extant conditions upon which this move was hinged are captured in the inaugural address to the

¹³⁹ Pamidy Amoah, "5000 tyres imported".

¹⁴⁰ Isaac Kojo Baah, Takoradi, July 16,2022.

¹⁴¹ Ghanaian Times, "Firestone to Stop Production", December 16,1980.

new Board of the Bonsa Tyre Company by the Minister of Industry, Science and Technology Mr.

M. P. Ansah:

Transportation is gradually grinding to a halt because of the acute shortage of tyres. I hope you may have now appreciated the importance of tyres in keeping the economy moving. To avert this unfortunate situation, you are earnestly enjoined to...ensure that production targets are met and maintained...This will be a great contribution to the government's effort to provide tyres and tubes to solve the country's acute transportation problem.¹⁴²

The government appeared to be buying time to minimise the social and economic consequences of the abrupt termination of production. It was aware that the Bonsa Tyre Company was under-producing as a result of the challenges outlined earlier and also much cognizant of the lack of technical knowledge to run the firm. Yet stopping production would halt and further worsen the already ailing motor transport system with devastating consequences for Ghana's faltering economy. This was because the company had come to play an essential role in managing the tyre shortage and needed to hold a little longer until such a period when Ghana could get private investors to resuscitate the company or mobilise enough foreign exchange to import adequate quantities of tyres.

The lack of technical capacity to run the Bonsa Tyre Company after the government takeover resulted in a technical and service agreement that was established between Firestone and the government of Ghana when Firestone sold its shares to the government. Under this deal, Bonsa Tyre Company was allowed to continue using Firestone Technology for the manufacture of tires in exchange for a fee.¹⁴³ Subsequently, a new board of directors was instituted to manage the company with four Firestone managers to provide technical and managerial support, as plant

¹⁴² Thomas K. Nyaku, "New Board for Bonsa Tyre Company and GREL" *Akoo* (Accra: Public Relations Dept. Firestone Ghana Limited, n.d), 2-3.

¹⁴³ African Development Bank, Project Completion Report Bonsa Rehabilitation Project, 1.

manager, chief engineer, technical coordinator and a manager for Ghana Rubber Estate Limited as plantation coordinator respectively.

This arrangement was nothing more than muddled management. There were severe internal management politics and scuffles which threatened to run down the operations of the firm.¹⁴⁴ As a result of these managerial impasses, several interventions were taken by the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) further resulting in managerial instability.¹⁴⁵ The creation of the Workers Defense Councils and the imposition of some political officials as part of the management of Bansa Tyre Company made some senior staff apprehensive. Some staff made several accusations of maladministration and corruption. Eventually, after government probing, some workers were laid off, and others were transferred or demoted to lower positions.¹⁴⁶

In 1981 the interim managing director, Mr D. E Milligan, urged the government to give the import license for tyre imports to Bansa Tyre Company to import more raw materials to increase production.¹⁴⁷ This was not heeded and the challenges with running the company such as lack of import license continued as before further reducing production capacity.

In 1986, the government made efforts to obtain a loan of ₵109 million from local commercial banks to clear raw material at the Tema Harbour and a plan to give a ₵ 351 million import license to the Bansa Tyre Company. This was meant to bring in raw materials and other essential materials to boost its production to curtail import licenses to private investors. These efforts were because the government still believed the Bansa Tyre Company could meet the country's tyre demands and needed investment to boost its production. These efforts were however

¹⁴⁴ "Here are the facts About Firestone", Ghanaian Times.

¹⁴⁵ "7 Bansa officials exonerated", Ghanaian Times; Ghanaweb, Bansa Tyre equipment going waste, 15 October 2006. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Bansa-Tyre-equipment-going-waste-112153>, July 13, 2022

¹⁴⁶ *Ghanaian Times*, "7 Bansa officials exonerated".

¹⁴⁷ Thomas K. Nyaku. "Tyre dealers Form New Body." Akoo, Accra: Public Relations Dept. Firestone Ghana Limited, n.d.

delayed.¹⁴⁸ However, the initial hesitation perhaps reflected the government's inability to meet the Bonsa Tyre Company import requirements. It could also have been a reflection of the government's optimism in securing a technical partner or investor before the temporary agreement expired. But whatever the reasons were, by this time, the technical and service arrangement was over, and Firestone voluntarily withdrew its technology and services. Even before this period some of the expatriate staff had left.¹⁴⁹ There was thus the urgent need to look for a new technical partner or private investor but not before support of a loan and import license was implemented to keep the factory in good standing because no investor would be interested in a company which was on the verge of folding up.

After the abrogation of the technical and service agreement in 1986, the Ghana government asked the African Development Bank (ADB) for help in rehabilitating the Bonsa Tyre Company factory at Bonsaso. However, the project's preparation was delayed because the company lacked the skilled and competent capacity to provide a technical study that the bank could use as a foundation for estimating the cost of the rehabilitation project. It was advised that the government of Ghana sign a contract with a new technical partner as a pre-condition for appraising the project given that the time given to search for a technical partner was running out.¹⁵⁰ As a result, the ADB asked the Bonsa Tyre Company board to approve the recruitment of a technical partner before the project was assessed. Once the request was approved Bonsa Tyre Company partnered with Dunlop International Projects Limited (DUNLOP) as a technical partner. The goal of the project was to upgrade, restore, and repair the current machinery while also retraining the technical staff to raise output to 1,231 tyres per day or around 350,000 tyres annually based on 280 working days.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ *Ghanaian Times*, "Bonsa Tyre Getting the Push", February 21, 1986.

¹⁴⁹ Frank Otchere, "Tyre Factory on the War Path", *Ghanaian Times*, October 21, 1981.

¹⁵⁰ African Development Bank, Project Completion Report, 4.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 2.

By 1994, the rehabilitation projects had undergone some test production runs and were almost finished but in December the project was temporarily put on hold. Several issues were encountered during the project implementation. First, Bonsa Tyre Company was unable to come up with the anticipated internally produced cash of 6.93 million dollars. Additionally, the government itself did not give the entire amount of their required fund. Therefore, the project's financial plan did not materialize. Second, during the early period of the rehabilitation, the management was ineffective. For instance, the company lacked a substantive managing director and management was at Accra, leading to difficulties in decisions at the factory at Bonsaso. The Bonsa Tyre Company also lack skilled personnel in the accounting and auditing departments. Moreover, after the factory's short shutdown in 1994, the few trained engineers left Bonsa Tyre Company.¹⁵²

Rehabilitation works resumed in the subsequent years, however in April 1998, with the repair work at about 98% complete, Dunlop abandoned the rehabilitation and commissioning work they were doing on the remaining essential phases of the tyre production process machinery. Dunlop's decision to abandon the project was because the ADB loan was completely depleted.

The delayed disbursements of the monies allotted for restoration activities led to cost overruns and the inability to get additional money for Dunlop's expanded services. The 2% of necessary rehabilitation and commissioning work that was still outstanding prevented the company from achieving its goal of raising production levels.¹⁵³ Again, low capacity utilization and the unfinished 2% renovation and commissioning combined with a lack of operating capital rendered the company's activities unprofitable. Moreover, the Technical Services Agreement called for Dunlop International representatives to train Bonsa Tyre Company workers, but this requirement

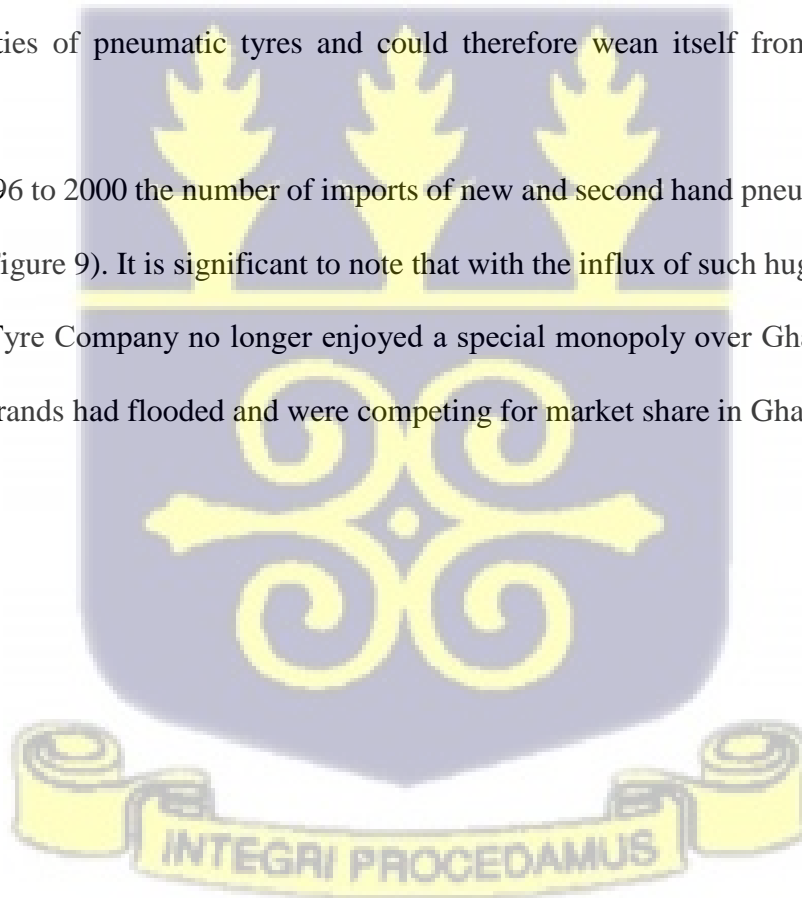
¹⁵² Ibid,9.

¹⁵³ Ibid,9.

was not properly implemented.¹⁵⁴ Dunlop did very little to help the Company's employees learn new technologies through the necessary training programs. As a result, although by 1998 the technical department had enough staff level, they lacked the proper training to effectively manage the new Dunlop technology.¹⁵⁵ These challenges culminated in the ineffectiveness of the rehabilitation process.

The managerial challenges and failed rehabilitation resulted in the government's wilted interest in operating the company and the decision to divest it. Besides, by the 1990s Ghana's economic recovery and Structural Adjustment reforms included import trade liberalization which provided foreign exchange to ease import restrictions.¹⁵⁶ Ghana could thus allow for the import of adequate quantities of pneumatic tyres and could therefore wean itself from the Bonsa Tyre Company.

From 1996 to 2000 the number of imports of new and second hand pneumatic rubber tyres increased. (see Figure 9). It is significant to note that with the influx of such huge volumes of tyre imports Bonsa Tyre Company no longer enjoyed a special monopoly over Ghana's tyre market. About ten tyre brands had flooded and were competing for market share in Ghana.¹⁵⁷



¹⁵⁴ Ibid,7.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

¹⁵⁶ Charles Ackah, Ernest Aryeetey, and Oliver Morrissey, "Trade, trade policy and total factor productivity: the case of Ghanaian manufacturing firms." *Globalization, Trade and Poverty in Ghana* (2012): 102.

¹⁵⁷ Agricultural Development Bank, Project Completion Report,12.

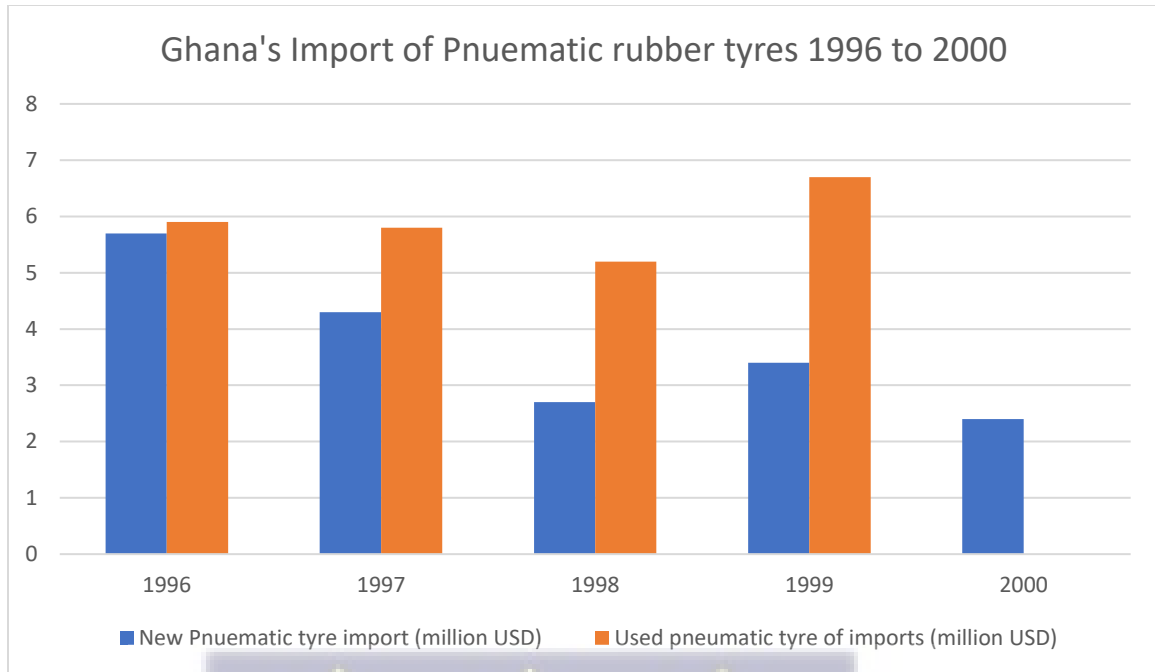


Figure 9. Source; <https://www.nationmaster.com>

From the temporary shutdown in 1994 government commenced a gradual retrenchment of workers.¹⁵⁸ All this while small quantities of tyres were being produced but huge losses were made resulting in an inability of the company to pay wages as well as power supply which eventually led to its closure. As a respondent recounted:

work continued after the rehabilitation; they had imported raw materials to the warehouse which could be used for a full year even if new imports were not available. So we had raw materials and we were working until 2000. In the 2000s it happened that the money used for the work did not return after its disbursement as it was supposed to...the tyres went out there but the money did not return to the extent that they owed us six months' arrears of pay. We kept working until one day, electricity officials came that they were going to take us off the line. When we asked why, they said we had defaulted our light bill. We had everything and production was running; the morning shift had come and tyres were being manufactured when electricity officials came to disconnect the power. When this happened there were several meetings and eventually, it came out that the government said it could not cover expenses for Bonsa Tyres anymore and that if the power had been disconnected the factory should be closed. So all the workers were laid off.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Amatus Domaninwini Zumgwire, interview by Author, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. Amatus was a former employee at Bonsa Tyre Company. Amatus and several others were given temporary termination of employment during the trial period and were never recalled.

¹⁵⁹ Samuel Ayim Asare, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 4, 2022. Samuel was a former employee at Bonsa Tyre Company. He worked as an electrician.

In 2000, all the workers were laid off except a skeletal staff of twenty-four (24) engaged by the Divestiture Implementation Committee (DIC) to do periodic services of the machines¹⁶⁰ From this period the company has remained defunct as the government has failed to successfully divest the company. Successive governments have been paying lip service to resuscitate the company with nothing to show for its promises. Indeed, some sections of the public have expressed scepticism about the resuscitation of the company.¹⁶¹ This scepticism has been confirmed because currently, the government intends to sell off the Bonsa Tyre Company and other defunct state enterprises to improve public enterprise portfolio as they have become liabilities to the state.¹⁶²

This chapter has demonstrated that the decline of the Bonsa Tyre Company in Ghana's automobile industry was the culmination of several factors that eroded its once-thriving presence. The company's downfall can be attributed to a combination of economic, managerial, and market-related challenges. The country's balance-of-payments problems and foreign exchange constraints in the 1970s hindered the company's access to necessary raw materials and spare parts for production. Furthermore, government actions, particularly the diversion of foreign exchange away from raw material imports, directly impacted the company's ability to sustain production levels. The resulting shortages and production suspensions contributed to a significant decline in the company's output.

In the market, changing consumer preferences played a crucial role. The economic hardships of the era influenced consumers' purchasing power, leading to a preference for cheaper

¹⁶⁰ Ghanaweb, "Bonsa Tyre equipment going waste".

¹⁶¹ Wendy Amarteifio, "W/r: We Are Sceptical about the Revamp of Bonsa Tyre Factory - Rubber Producers," Prime News Ghana, June 11, 2019, <https://www.primenewsghana.com/general-news/w-r-we-are-skeptical-about-revamp-of-bonsa-tyre-factory-rubber-producers-to-gov-t.html>.

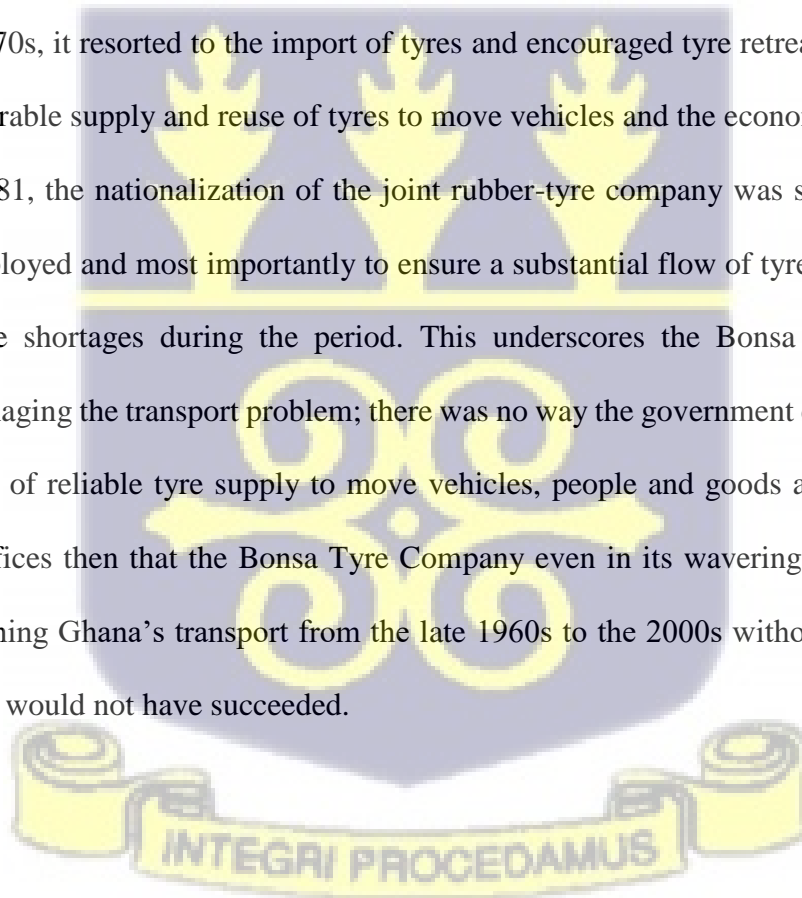
¹⁶² Emelia Ennin Abbey, "17 Defunct state enterprises to be sold," Graphic Online, July 19, 2023, <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/17-defunct-state-enterprises-to-be-sold.html>

second-hand and imported tires. Liberalized trade policies further fueled tire imports and the demand for imported tires, undermining the Bansa Tyre Company's market position.

Also, the company's managerial struggles compounded its decline. Internal management conflicts, a lack of technical expertise, and failed rehabilitation attempts hampered the company's operations. The technical partnership with Dunlop International also faltered due to financial constraints and inadequate training for local staff.

Notwithstanding its decline and subsequent collapse, it is important to note the company was not irrelevant. From the beginning of its production in 1969, the Bansa Tyre Company made an effort to increase and sustain production to meet Ghana's tyre needs. During the years of decline from the late 1970s, it resorted to the import of tyres and encouraged tyre retreading. This was to ensure a considerable supply and reuse of tyres to move vehicles and the economy.

From 1981, the nationalization of the joint rubber-tyre company was significant to keep the workers employed and most importantly to ensure a substantial flow of tyres in the market in light of the tyre shortages during the period. This underscores the Bansa Tyre Company's centrality to managing the transport problem; there was no way the government could shut it down until it was sure of reliable tyre supply to move vehicles, people and goods and thus move the economy. It suffices then that the Bansa Tyre Company even in its wavering performance was central in sustaining Ghana's transport from the late 1960s to the 2000s without which Ghana's transport system would not have succeeded.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE BONSA TYRE COMPANY AND GHANA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

This chapter discusses the significance of the Bonsa Tyre Company to Ghana's development. This is done at two levels: first with the motor transport economy and second with the development of the Bonsa community. Adei and Sawyerr have emphasized the exploitation of the transnational company Firestone in running the joint rubber-tyre company.¹⁶³ Lambert's question about how Ghanaians benefited from the company was apt because the exploitation narrative is not the entire picture of the firm's history as it neglects ways Bonsa Tyre Company impacted the socio-economic development of Ghana. I argued in this chapter that despite its chequered history the Bonsa Tyre Company played a pivotal role not only in Ghana's transport sector but other aspects of the country's development. Its establishment and collapse also marked a significant watershed in the development of the Bonsa community.

Bonsa Tyre Company and Ghana's Transport Industry

In the second chapter, it was shown that limited tyre import was one of the challenges of Ghana's budding motor transport industry from its inception in the early 1900s to the 1930s. This problem was further compounded in the 1940s when the colonial government channeled tyre supply to its war effort leading to a further reduction in tyre supply in the colony. Again tyres imported were not suitable for local climatic conditions and thus tyre dealers were cautious of

¹⁶³ Adei, Technological Capacity, 1504-1506, Sawyerr "Multinational Corporations and Development, 267-294.

importing large quantities to prevent losses as a result of deterioration during storage. From the 1960s, Ghana's motor transport challenges kept getting worse. In the previous chapter, it was indicated that tyres and spare parts shortages affected the relocation project of the Volta River Authority in 1964. In February 1969, the Executive Manager of State Transport Cooperation, Nana Fredua Mensah expressed regret at the government's lack of attention to Ghana's transport sector, particularly road transport and called for the need to modernize the sector.¹⁶⁴ Again a commentary on Ghana's transport in 1973 described the experiences of the public as follows:

The problem of transportation in the cities and rural areas is still a pressing one...The unfortunate result is that workers are often stranded at lorry parks for hours, and taxis often charge exorbitant fares for even the shortest distance...taxi drivers seem to have taken the motor law of the country into their own hands...when there are a great number of travellers at our lorry parks, drivers and bookmen increase fares in an attempt to exploit travellers.¹⁶⁵

These two anecdotal pieces of evidence symbolizes a general picture of Ghana's transport terrain during the 1970s. But, underpinning this problem was several interrelated challenges such as bad road network, shortage of cars, spare parts, and tyre. Tyre shortage has been one of the most persistent and critical of these problems. In 1973, drivers in Tema called for a probe into tyre shortages in Ghana. The Tema Branch of the Private Transport Union of the Trade Union Congress suggested that the government should grant import licenses to motor firms and spare part dealers to import outer covers (tyres) which were in short supply in the country.¹⁶⁶ Also, in the late 1970s, 150 commercial vehicles were parked for about two weeks in the Akim Oda district because of a lack of road-worthy tyres.¹⁶⁷ As a result of these problems, transport fares increased tremendously. During this period while drivers were demonized as the worst public enemy, drivers also pointed

¹⁶⁴ *Ghanaian Times* "Modernize Ghana's Transport System-Fredua Mensah", February 28, 1969.

¹⁶⁵ *Ghanaian Times*, "Front Page Comment; Transportation", August 7, 1973.

¹⁶⁶ *Ghanaian Times*, "Probe Tyre Shortage Government Urged", September 25, 1973.

¹⁶⁷ Pamidy Amoah, "5000 tyres imported part of consignment in already", *Daily Graphic*, June 8, 1978.

to increased prices of spare parts, lubricants, and tyres in their defence.¹⁶⁸ This impacted the work of drivers, the transport of goods from rural areas to urban centres, as well as the transport of people from place to place. It is within this context that the Bansa Tyre Company should be assessed.¹⁶⁹

The ensuing shortage especially in the early 1970s as described above could be attributed in part to the measures in the joint agreement between Ghana and Firestone which was meant to provide demand for the company's tyres. This was because the special guarantees and privileges given to the company stipulated that until the company started commercial production Ghana would not license the importation of tyre tubes and retread materials in quantities above normal market requirements; that after it started commercial production, no licenses were to be issued for the importation of any items that could be supplied by the company.¹⁷⁰ This gave the company monopoly control over the rubber tyres market in Ghana. However this also meant that most motorists were reliant on locally produced Bansa tyres which unlike imported tyres were made specifically for local conditions.

Drivers recount the quality of the Bansa Tyre Company products for local conditions and their reliability. For instance, some respondents recalled that what made the Bansa Tyre Company tyres unique was their use of "thread" which enabled the tyres to last longer and keep their shape even under severe road conditions where other tyres made with metal components developed humps.¹⁷¹ Thus Bansa tyres gave motorists better performance and reliability compared to

¹⁶⁸ *Ghanaian Times*, "Koforidua Taxi Drivers Defy the Law", July 9, 1983; *Ghanaian Times* "Drivers Accept New Fares but...", July 10, 1980.

¹⁶⁹ It should be noted again that the company was renamed as Bansa Tyre company after the Ghana Government had bought the shares of Firestone. Hitherto the company was called Firestone Ghana Limited but Bansa Tyre company has been used throughout this work for uniformity and to prevent possible confusion.

¹⁷⁰ GH/PRAAD RG 1/2/163, The republic of Ghana and Firestone Tyre and rubber Company Master Agreement; Sawyer, Multinational corporations and development; a case of the rubber industry in Ghana, 278-279.

¹⁷¹ John Mortuy, Retired Driver, interview by Author, Takoradi, July 16, 2022; Issac Kojo Baah, Takoradi, July 16, 2022.

imported tyres. This improved the driving experience and safety for motorists in Ghana. For instance, as recently as 2006 appeals were made to the government to ban the importation of second-hand tyres and resuscitate the Bonsa Tyre Factory to resolve the risk associated with the use of second-hand tyres.¹⁷² The use of "thread" in the Bonsa Tyre Company's products, as mentioned by respondents also contributed to their longevity. This meant that Ghanaian motorists could expect their tyres to last longer, reducing the frequency of replacements and providing cost savings in the long run.

The Bonsa Tyre Company also provided an opportunity for the expansion of the domestic tyre industry in Ghana. For instance, as part of the company's tyre distribution system, it also provided services including mounting, dismounting, balancing, and front-end alignment among other services to motorists at its various dealer centres.¹⁷³ This meant a local tyre industry not limited to only sales of tyres by dealers but one which was inclusive of other services in the transport sector for motorists.

Notwithstanding the importation of tyres during the declining years of the Bonsa Tyre Company which paints a gloomy image of the performance of the Bonsa Tyre Company, the centrality of the contribution of the company to Ghana's motor industry cannot be underestimated. It played a key role in Ghana's transport system by providing tyres (through its production as well as imports) and services for local motor transport conditions such as safe driving tips.

Motor vehicle accidents have been a major social issue in Ghana's transport industry. Although it is very difficult to establish the number of accidents caused specifically by tyre-related accidents and fatalities within the period under review, motorists attest that tyre-related problems

¹⁷² GNA, "AGI urges ban on importation of second hand tyres", Modern Ghana, April 11, 2006. Accessed, October 19, 2022. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/98165/agi-urges-ban-on-importation-of-second-hand-tyres.html>

¹⁷³ Firestone in Ghana with Ghana (Accra: Firestone Ghana Ltd n.d), 16.

such as worn-out tyres, punctures, and explosions among others were a great threat to safe driving and public safety. Thus, proper tyre usage and maintenance are undoubtedly key to safe driving. It prevents the possible occurrence of road accidents and inconveniences resulting from tyre-related failures. A respondent noted;

...there were tyres used for commercial and private cars and each had different levels of air pressure when the air was too much it would burst... When buying a tyre one should know the kind of tyre to buy. Most drivers and car owners could not distinguish between various tyres for different seasons, especially used tires including winter and summer tires. They bought tyres meant for different seasons and this caused a lot of accidents, they bought tyres based on the glaring patterns on the tyres but these could be expired imported tyres. So when moving, the tires could explode at any time and when that happens you can't control it. Let's say on the highway the speed limit is eighty kilometres or fifty kilometres when you exceed those limits and it explodes you cannot apply any brakes and when it explodes and you apply brakes it will eventually result in an accident.¹⁷⁴

Another respondent also indicated that

...when tyres are threadbare and you drive while it is raining, because the patterns on the tyres which work like sandpaper to grip the road surface and make the car stop are wiped away, it becomes slippery. So when driving on a tarred road, especially asphalt at top speed and someone stops in front of you, automatically the brake will work but because the tyres are worn out it cannot stop. Even when it is sunny it still slips...¹⁷⁵

These narratives attest to some of the risks associated with tyre usage and some of the circumstances around which it can endanger public safety. The prevalence of reusing old tyres during times of shortage came with a lot of risks to motorists as well as the general public. Old tyres or second-hand tyres not only have a short usage time, but they also have a higher tendency to cause road accidents because they are prone to develop faults and their inability grip to the road surface when the brake is applied. New tyres also picked up debris such as sharp metals between their patterns causing punctures, wear and tear and therefore had to be checked regularly.

¹⁷⁴ Samuel Kofi Eku, interviewed by Author, Winneba, July 7, 2022. Samuel is a retired driver and a station master. He started driving around 1970.

¹⁷⁵ Isaac Kojo Baah, Takoradi, July 16, 2022.

In this regard, from the 1970s the Bansa Tyre Company provided weekly tips to the public on proper tyre storage, usage and maintenance in a bid to ensure safe driving. These tips which were usually shown on the front page, and sometimes on the fifth to seventh pages of newspapers particularly the *Ghanaian Times* would have been hard to miss by readers interested in learning as well as applying such essential tips.



Figure 10. Bansa Tyre Company (Firestone Ghana Limited) tyre tip at the right margin of the front page of Ghanaian Times. Source; Ghanaian Times, Friday, March 12, 1974.

The tips traversed many topics of tyre use and maintenance including proper storage, checking tyre leakages, installing tubed and tubeless tyres, tyre rotation techniques, tyre pressure, tyre retreading, and petrol tips among others. The tips also reached various sections of the Ghanaian public who may not have necessarily been commercial or motorists at all. For instance, in a quiz competition meant to draw the public's attention to these tips in 1977, there were over five thousand entries from various sections of the country. Interestingly, out of the three people who emerged winners, the second place went to a woman from the Koforidua General Hospital and the runner-up was a student of the St. Aquinas Secondary School.¹⁷⁶ Although this can be regarded as part of Bansa Tyre Company's marketing strategy it nonetheless also shows the fact

¹⁷⁶ *Ghanaian Times*, "Firestone Quiz Winners" April 11, 1977,

that it had become an important voice to the Ghanaian tyre culture and public safety reaching different sections of the general public.

The Bonsa Tyre Company also recognized that vulcanizing services were a much-needed resource to complement these efforts. Their services would ensure longer use of new as well as old tyres. Drivers usually resorted to the use of old tyres or second-hand tyres as a remedy to the ensuing lack of tyres. Yet second-hand tyres were not a lasting remedy because they could only be used for a limited number of months and usually developed punctures and tears. In this regard, the Bonsa Tyre Company, offered a series of free special weekly tyre servicing courses to interested vulcanizers at the various district offices at Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi and Tamale to ensure efficient tyre services to motorists. This began in June 1978 in Accra and was followed subsequently by training at the various centres respectively.¹⁷⁷ Thus making vulcanizers a lifeline to sustaining the flailing motor transport system.

From the foregoing, we can appreciate how regardless of the Bonsa Tyre Company's wavering performance, considerable efforts were put into managing the supply, use and distribution of tires in Ghana as well as ensuring the safe use of tyres in Ghana.¹⁷⁸

Bonsa Tyre Company and Ghana's Labour Market?

The company's contribution to Ghana's economy also included the labour market as well. The Bonsa Tyre company created work opportunities for local workers. First, the establishment of

¹⁷⁷*Daily Graphic* "Firestone Calling all Vulcanizers", 31 May, 1978.

¹⁷⁸ Kwaku Bamfo (Driver since the 1980s) and Gifty Mensah (Trader), interview by Author, Winneba, June 6, 2022. Worn-out Bonsa Tyre Company tyres were also useful in repairing and making shoes and sandals to protect the feet. Discarded Bonsa Tyre Company tyres were burnt by some cobblers (Shoemakers) to extract the fabric for shoe repairs and were most suitable for making local tyres sandals or slippers called Abongo or Tawuto. Gifty's father was a driver for a construction firm. She recalled cobblers who came for the tyres from her father used them for Abongo and some burnt them to extract threadlike fabric for shoe repair. The fabric was dyed in a black substance and wound into bundles to be used for shoes and sandal repairs.

the company provided employment opportunities for Ghanaians. Like many industrial constructions, major parts of its establishment were left to the services of civil engineering and construction firms which also employed local labour, Other forms of casual labour were directly employed. For instance, between March and June 1965 there were about 32 casual labourers on the government payroll, each earning between £G 1 to £G 17 a month for different services such as security (watchmen), carpenters, masons, or general labourers. It would not be farfetched to infer that such instances of casual labour were employed intermittently for various services throughout its establishment. The entire Bensa tyre company consist of about twenty-eight major physical structures and blocks which require a large number of labour to set up. Thus the company's establishment was an avenue of employment for labourers such as day labourers, masons and carpenters to build.¹⁷⁹

Again, after the physical infrastructure had been set up production processes also provided employment for Ghanaians. As part of the basic materials needed for tyre manufacturing raw rubber was indispensable (other materials included nylon and rayon fabric, high-tensile steel and carbon black). Ghana Rubber Estate Limited was in charge of the Nursing, Grafting, planting, maintenance and tapping of the rubber trees. Trained tappers had to make about a millimetre cut on the bark of the trees each morning for the latex to flow into collection cups. After the tapping, the collected latex was mixed with formic acid to make it coagulate into lumps. The lump was sent to the rubber processing plant at Bonsaso where they were milled into workable pieces, dried and forwarded for manufacturing at the tyre factory.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Barnicon Property Valuation and Consultancy Services, Valuation Report, 87-91.

¹⁸⁰ Firestone in Ghana with Ghana (Accra: Firestone Ghana Ltd n.d)

All these activities were manned in the factory by Ghanaian labour of about 300 with some in senior positions and a limited number of expatriate officials.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, Adei and Sawyer have amply shown and emphasized the fact that under Firestone, the supply of raw rubber was solely from the various Ghana Rubber Estate Limited plantations and thus even though the government-owned 55 per cent share in Ghana Rubber Estate Limited with a remaining shares owned by Firestone, local rubber producers were left at the mercy of Firestone.¹⁸² It tied the prices of crude rubber in the country to the global market prices which were plummeting as a result of the expansive use of synthetic rubber.¹⁸³ By 1974, farmers were calling for a relaxation of the restrictive provision in the pact with the expatriate partner to enable Ghana Rubber Estate Limited to offer appreciable prices based on local demands for rubber.¹⁸⁴ Although the circumstances of rubber farmers seemed quite shaky as a result of this change, on the other hand, it emphasizes the centrality of the Bansa Tyre company to rubber farmers as a key source of income for their subsistence.

Once the Bansa tyre company began production, it created other direct and indirect livelihood opportunities. These included workers not directly involved in the production of raw materials or manufacturing processes but in various aspects of distribution and sales. For instance, as mentioned earlier in the 1970s the company had about 87 certified tyre dealers spread across the regions of Ghana. These depots of tyre storage and sales were a source of livelihood for Ghanaians employed in the sales and provision of tyre-related services to motorists at the various centres. Distribution services also involved the transport of tyres and tubes to these centres thus creating employment for drivers who were engaged in these deliveries. The objective at this point

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Sawyer, *Multinational corporations and development*, 281.

¹⁸³ *Ghanaian Times*, "Review Firestone Pact, Agric Workers", August 23, 1974.

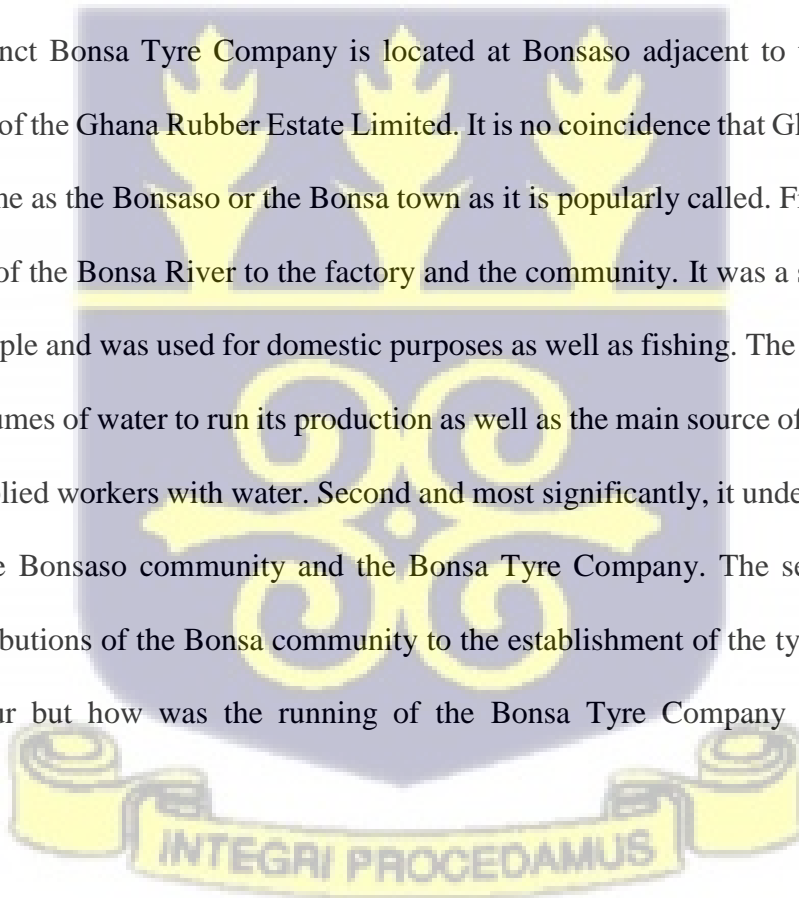
¹⁸⁴ *Ghanaian Times* "Probe Tyre Shortage Government Urged", September 1973.

is not show the Bonsa Tyre Company as a unique provider of employment but to emphasize that in the declining socio-economic circumstances of Ghana from the 1970s and 80s with attendant labour retrenchment and decline in wage employment, these employments provided a stable source of livelihood for those directly or indirectly involved in the firm's chain of activities.¹⁸⁵

The Bonsa Tyre Company and The Bonsaso Community

This section highlights the socio-economic relations that evolved as a result of community-company interactions and how these affected the people during the active years and after the collapse of the Bonsa Tyre Company.

The defunct Bonsa Tyre Company is located at Bonsaso adjacent to the former rubber processing plant of the Ghana Rubber Estate Limited. It is no coincidence that Ghana's tyre factory has the same name as the Bonsaso or the Bonsa town as it is popularly called. First, it underscores the significance of the Bonsa River to the factory and the community. It was a source of drinking water for the people and was used for domestic purposes as well as fishing. The factory also relied much on the volumes of water to run its production as well as the main source of a water treatment plant which supplied workers with water. Second and most significantly, it underscores the shared past between the Bonsaso community and the Bonsa Tyre Company. The second chapter has shown the contributions of the Bonsa community to the establishment of the tyre factory through communal labour but how was the running of the Bonsa Tyre Company significant to the community?



¹⁸⁵ Formal sector employment grew steadily from 332,900 in 1960 to 483,500 in 1976, It remained stagnant between 1976 and 1979, and began to decline between 1980 and 1982. See Augustine Fosu, and Ernest Aryeetey, "Ghana's Post-Independence Economic Growth 1960-2000," in *The Economy of Ghana: Analytical Perspectives on Stability, Growth, and Poverty*, ed. Ernest Aryeetey, Ravi Kanbur, and Louis Kasekende (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31-60.

In the 1960s Bonsa was a village partly inhabited by Nigerians who were predominantly engaged in lobster fishing on the Bonsa River and gari making with casava supply from local farmers.¹⁸⁶ They played an important role in the community. For instance, an informant recalled that “when the Nigerians were here they used canoes to harvest fishes and shrimps. They were stationed under the bridge like a kind of beach. Everyone went there to buy fish from them.”¹⁸⁷ Some of these Nigerians were also employed as casual workers during the initial stages of the construction of the factory.¹⁸⁸ Records of workers employed as casual labour included names such as Braima Lagos, and Edwin Ogbize (also spelt Ogbizi) which suggest the presence of Nigerians in the area. Eventually, when the Aliens Compliance Order was passed by the Kofi Abrefa Busia’s government in 1969, they were deported.¹⁸⁹ Yet, the beginning of the Bonsa Tyre Company also saw an influx of people from Tarkwa, Tarkoradi and nearer communities to the locality.

Significant development of Bonsaso following the establishment and running of the Bonsa Tyre Company was the rise in population as a result of the influx of workers and people seeking to find economic opportunities and its repercussions on local economic activities. In 1960 the total population of Bonsa No.1 was 378 and Bonsa No.2 was 350 respectively making a total of 728.¹⁹⁰ There was a gradual swelling of the community’s population during the establishment as well as the active years of the firm’s operation. By 1970 there had been a significant increase of 308.

¹⁸⁶ Kwaku Frimpong, interviewed by author, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. 60-year-old Kwaku is a member and family secretary of the Atakora family at Bonsaso. He was born and raised at Bonsaso but currently resides at Takoradi.

¹⁸⁷ Rose Danquah, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 3, 2022. Rose was Born at Bonsaso and is the granddaughter of the chief of Bonsaso. She was employed at the BONSA TYRE COMPANY as stenographer Typist in 1980. She has also served as a two-time assembly woman for the locality.

¹⁸⁸ PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/1686.

¹⁸⁹ Kwaku Frimpong, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. The Aliens Compliance Order policy was introduced during the administration of Prime Minister Kofi Abrefa Busia. While the policy's intentions were to promote better control over immigration and protect the rights of Ghanaians in the workforce, it was criticized for being implemented in a manner that targeted specific groups and led to the expulsion of a significant number of people, including many Nigerians and other Africans.

¹⁹⁰ PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 24/2/292. 1960 Population Census of Ghana Wassa South Dompim Local Council, 37.

During the construction of the Bonsa Tyre Company, an immediate effect was an influx of construction workers to the Bonsaso community. The consequent increase in the population resulted in increased demand for food crops which was a strain on the subsistent food supply and resulted in a relatively high cost of living at Bonsaso.¹⁹¹

Moreover, the company had affected agricultural activities in the community as some labour for agriculture was absorbed by the company. For instance, by 1970 the number of people engaged in agriculture-related activities was only about 170.¹⁹² Some workers of the Bonsa Tyre Company were compelled to engage in cash crops such as oil palm and food crop agriculture.¹⁹³ This was necessary to cut down the expenditure on food crops as well as to provide an alternative source of income to support themselves.¹⁹⁴

The population surge also led to the problem of housing primarily as a result of the inadequate accommodation available to the majority of the Bonsa Tyre Company employees. As a result of this scarcity, a significant number of workers sought housing in more urbanized areas like Tarkwa, Aboso, or Dompim.¹⁹⁵ However, some employees chose to settle in Bonsaso, where they have since become permanent residents with their families in the community.

¹⁹¹ PRAAD-Accra RG 7/1/774. Rubber Tyre Factory Bonsaso, 58.

¹⁹² Census Office, 1970 Population Census of Ghana, Volume II (Accra: Census Office, 1972), 48-49.

¹⁹³ Theophilus Nyinaku, interviewed by author, Bonsaso, May 11, 2022. 83-year-old Theophilus was employed at the Bonsa Tyre Company in 1974 as maintenance supervisor at the curing department. He recalled the shutdown of the company did not affect him much because he had invested in cultivating oil palm. He is from Accra but has settled permanently at Bonsaso with his family; Paul Ersah, Interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. 73-year-old Paul Ersah, is originally from Nzima but now a resident of Bonsaso. He was employed in 1978 and worked as a tyre Builder for five years and was later transferred to quality control department. He also engaged in food crop farming to supplement his livelihood and relies largely on this after the collapse of the Bonsa Tyre Company for his sustenance.

¹⁹⁴ Ghanaweb, "Divestiture of Bonsa Tyre and GIHOC". Graphic Online, September 14, 2010. Accessed June 13, 2021. <https://mobile.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Divestiture-of-Bonsa-Tyre-GIHOC-190342>.

¹⁹⁵ Amatus Domaninmwini Zumgwire, Bonsaso, May 4, 2022.

The impact of the Bonsa Tyre Company on the Bonsa community can also be traced to the company's conditions of work. The company gained a reputation as a well-run company that cared for its employees and provided them with housing, transportation, training, and health care.¹⁹⁶ Employees of the rubber company as well as the tyre factory enjoyed many social amenities. Senior management staff benefited from housing facilities at the company bungalows at Bonsaso. However, the majority of the staff lived in nearby towns and some in the Bonsa community. Consequently, the workers were given transport services which brought them to work and took them to their places of residence after their shifts. There was also treated water and free medical care for workers. They also enjoyed subsidized canteen, on-the-job training and possible opportunities for further training abroad. The company operated a three daily eight-hour work shift.¹⁹⁷ This enabled workers to have sufficient rest and sometimes engage in other supplementary occupations to support themselves.¹⁹⁸ These were necessary to keep workers motivated as well as for maximum productivity. Also working with the machines was risky and injuries sometimes occurred.¹⁹⁹ It was, therefore, necessary for regular safety training and workshops as well as ready medical care in such circumstances.

The work conditions facilitated ancillary benefits for the Bonsa community. Bonsaso had no medical facility. The residents had to go to nearby towns such as Dompim, Simpa, or Tarkwa for medical care.²⁰⁰ However, when the Bonsa Tyre Company was established, the medical

¹⁹⁶ Amatus Domaninmwini Zumgwire, Bonsaso, May 4, 2022. The housing facilities were reserved for the expatriate officers and some few high Ghanaian officials until the takeover by the Ghana government.

¹⁹⁷ Bonsa Tyre Company Limited, Collective Agreement between Bonsa Tyre Company and Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of TUC (Ghana), January 1, 1987.

¹⁹⁸ Paul Ersah, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. Paul recalled he used to go to his farm on days when he did not have mornings shifts and returned early enough to go to work during the afternoon shift.

¹⁹⁹ Amatus Domaninmwini Zumgwire, Bonsa, May 4, 2022; Paul Ersah, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. Both informants had sustained various degrees of injuries.

²⁰⁰ Sarah Amakye, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. Sarah is a Fante from Elmina and came to Bonsaso when her husband (now deceased) was employed at the Bonsa Tyre Company as a mason. She was initially a food vendor at the Bonsa Tyre Company but was later employed at the canteen section to prepare their Kenkey (food

services it provided for its workers were extended to the families of the workers. The medical care covered up to five members of a worker's dependents. Since most of the townspeople were workers they could receive medical care for themselves and their dependents. A respondent recounted her experiences as follows:

There was no health centre here. We used to go to Dompim, Simpa, Nsuaem or Tarkwa. If your husband worked at the factory, that is where you would go. They didn't take money; some doctors could perform operations if need be. They did very well. During the time of Dr Hammond even if you were near death he would revive you...When I was sick I went to the Firestone, my husband was also working there. If they gave me a prescription where I had to buy them outside, I would come back and take the money I spent on the prescription. They were really good. They would take care of all your children as well.²⁰¹

Another informant, also recalled that "there was a clinic for the workers. If you were a Bonsa resident and you got injured and your husband worked there, even if your husband did not work there they would help you or the children."²⁰² Thus community members employed by the Bonsa Tyre Company and their dependents enjoyed free access to the company's health service for their health needs and cut down the cost of health care.

It is important to note that the mention of health benefits if one's husband worked at the tyre factory as described by these respondents, is no coincidence but speaks to how the nature of work and in the Bonsa Tyre Company determined the activities of men and women played in the company with attendant ramifications for Bonsa community. It is quite difficult to determine the company's formal policy towards the employment of men or women and why they were given the roles they played in the absence of any formal policy statement that suggests so. But at least from

made from corn dough and cooked in plantain leaves wrap). She is 70 years old and resides at Bonsa No. 1 with her family.

²⁰¹ Sarah Amakye Bonsa, May 5, 2022.

²⁰² Dora Kowfi, interviewed by Author, Bonsa May 4, 2022. Dora lived with Rose Danquah at the Bonsa Tyre Company Bungalow at her early teenage years. She is now 53 years and a unit committee member at Bonsaso.

the foregoing and as recounted by one informant, it can be inferred that the running of the tyre company was largely dominated by men. He recounted that

Women did not do some of the work unless at the canteen and when you went to the offices some women were secretaries but just a small number of them. All the workers were about two hundred (200) and the ladies were not up to about twenty (20); the rest were all men. The nature of the work made it quite difficult for women. The handling of the machines would lead to injuries for the women so they did not allow women inside. They were only at the office as secretaries and they typed our things for us. The women were more in the account section and about eight (8) of them were in the production section but all of them were secretaries...²⁰³

It can be inferred that at least while the Bonsa Tyre Company was inclusive of women, the dangerous nature of work made men the dominant workforce in the firm's activities which reinforced the notion where men (husbands) were perceived as the intermediary to some social services, in this case, health services at the factory as described by the respondents. But there were exceptions where one did not necessarily have to have a husband working at the company. Women employed at the Bonsa Tyre Company had direct access to healthcare for themselves and their children.²⁰⁴

It is also clear from the foregoing that indeed while some kinds of work such as handling machines were deemed risky for women and thus better suited for men this was tainted with subtle, if not obvious notions about the capabilities of men and women. Women were seen to have a low capacity to handle machines and thus relegated to the canteen or secretarial work as the evidence suggests.

These experiences were not peculiar. It mirrored prevailing gender inequalities that characterized the colonial period and continued into the immediate post-independent economy of

²⁰³ Paul Ersah, Bonsa, May 5,2022.

²⁰⁴ Rose Danquah, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 3,2022.

Ghana. The extraction of raw materials during the colonial period put men at the forefront of the emergent middle class thus gaining higher economic and social status. In the economic and political changes that occurred during the post-colonial period, women remained the most vulnerable with little education, training, and skills and the majority of women remained in petty trading, food processing, and marketing food crops. In the official employment sector, women were pushed to secretarial work and were kept out of higher positions.²⁰⁵ The Bona Tyre Company was no exception to this situation. For instance, the new board of directors was inaugurated in 1981 after the government takeover of the tyre company and Ghana Rubber Estate Limited had only one woman, Ms. A. V. A. Wood.²⁰⁶

Moreover, a report on the rehabilitation of the Bona Tyre Company from 1991 to 1994 emphasized this even more clearly. It mentioned that the implementation of the project has had no positive impact on women and children in the project area and that their involvement in the factory has been negligible. The only involvement of women was limited to informal sector activities. Also, out of the 275 workers that remained during the rehabilitation, there were about five women; one was in the security department and the others were secretaries and nurses.²⁰⁷ The report also acknowledged the need to make changes to the disparity when commercial production began yet as we saw in the previous chapter commercial production could not resume after 1994 when the rehabilitation was abandoned by the government. Notwithstanding the marginal position and the small number of women, one can assert that women in the Bona Tyre Company and the Bonsaso community played a significant role in the running of the Bona Tyre Company.

²⁰⁵ Abass, Usman, and F. C. Döşkaya. "The position of women in the social and political history of Ghana." *Journal of Turkish World Studies* 17, no. 2 (2017), 141-162.

²⁰⁶ Thomas K. Nyaku, "Know your Directors," *Akoo* (Accra: Public Relations Dept. Firestone Ghana Limited, n.d), 4.

²⁰⁷ ADB report, 10.

To further elaborate on some of the significant roles women played, the limited nature of the workers' subsidized feeding provided food vending opportunities in the Bonsaso community. For every eight-hour shift, workers were fed only once. Women from the community and nearby villages capitalized on this to provide different kinds of food services for the workers, thus providing employment and a ready market for food vendors within the locality. Food vendors sold their food at the company premises. A respondent narrated that she used to sell cooked cassava in the morning and the afternoon, she sold bananas. She recalled that food vendors waited at the gate to sell their food and returned happy because they had a pocket full of money.²⁰⁸ Other informants also observed that commerce was very vibrant in the town. Women cooked different kinds of food such as yams and rice. These were ready by the time workers got to the work premises in the morning. So there were a lot of food vendors that workers bought food from before work started. This, they recalled, made commercial activities vibrant at Bonsaso.²⁰⁹

Food vending stimulated a string of other interconnected local business activities in such areas as those in food crops and vegetables; fuel for cooking; meat or fish trade; utensils for cooking; and tables and chairs for eating places among other related commercial activities. It is important to indicate that these food vending businesses were vital to the functioning of the Bona Tyre Company as they supplemented the company's feeding scheme and provided a variety of alternative foods to satisfy workers' taste as well as the energy they needed to work.



²⁰⁸ Rose Danquah, Bonsa, May 3, 2022.

²⁰⁹ Dora Kowfi, Interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 4, 2022. She recalled that most of the women had “chop bars” and her mother was one of these women specialized in the preparing and selling Kokonte (a local dish made with dried cassava flour); Paul Ersah, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 5, 2022; Samuel Ayim Asare, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 4, 2022.

Another contribution of the company to the community was in the provision of transport services. In the 1960s commercial transportation was very scarce in the Bonsaso locality.²¹⁰ The Bonsa Tyre Company bus service to workers was an alternative avenue of transport in the locality until the collapse of the company. The buses were scheduled to pick up workers from stop terminals at Tarkwa, Simpa, Dompim and Aboso to Bonsa and people had to schedule their activities to coincide with the time of arrival or departure of the company buses. One respondent recounted;

On one of those days when I was in labour, it was the bus going to Dompim that took me there. They gave us free transport but only when they were not transporting workers. You could board the bus when they were on their way to get the workers if you knew their time. We used to transport maize to the mill at Tarkwa, there was no mill here. So after the milling, you wait till they come to drop off the worker then you board it.²¹¹

The bus service was run three times a day, morning, afternoon and night. Samuel, a former worker and a church elder also recalled, “When the church had to go for a program at another place such as Tarkwa we could join the company bus.”²¹² The Bonsa Tyre Company transport service was thus essential to residents of Bonsaso for commuting between towns and villages along the Tarkwa-Takoradi road.

The provision of social services to the community also included electricity. During the 1960s the distribution of electricity was only limited to industrial and urbanized areas and as mentioned in the second chapter, getting the Bonsa Tyre Company connected to the national grid

²¹⁰ Kwaku Frimpong, interviewed by author, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. 60-year-old Kwaku is a member and family secretary of the Attakora family at Bonsaso. He was born and raised at Bonsaso but currently resides at Takoradi.

²¹¹ Sarah Amakye, Bonsa, May 5, 2022.

²¹² Samuel Ayim Asare, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 4, 2022. Samuel worked for seventeen years as an electrician at the Bonsa Tyre Company. He was laid off around 1994 during the rehabilitation when the trial production had ended.

was saddled with some level of uncertainty until it was eventually connected. But electricity in rural areas was something perceived as a novelty and prestige. The introduction of electricity to Bonsaso by the Bonsa Tyre Company was thus perceived as such, though it did not have any profound or widespread use in the entire community because of its limited nature. The Bonsa Tyre Company extended the company's electricity supply to the chief's palace and his wife's house and later to some resident supervisors residing in the Bonsa town and provided streetlights.²¹³ Paul recalled "Some supervisors, (about five of them) resided in the town and it was those that the man (Dick Hawk) extended the light to. The rest of us slept in darkness."²¹⁴ Rose also recounted this with additional details

We did not even have light in this town so they (her parents) pleaded with the whites. I cannot recall their names well; Garvin, Fitzpatrick, Dick and others, we told them and they gave us one light at the palace and one for my mom's house and street light.²¹⁵

Similarly, while narrating the introduction of electricity at Bonsaso, Obed could not hide the enthusiasm he felt about it when he recounted that "...because of Bonsa tyres we were the first to see electricity before neighbouring towns in the Prestea-Tarkwa district."²¹⁶

It can be inferred from the above that the extension of the Bonsa Tyre Company's electricity supply albeit limited not only emphasized the exclusivity of those who got to use it but it was perceived as prestige to be the first to have it in one's community. Eventually, when the Bonsa Tyre Company folded up it was disconnected from the electricity supply but by then Bonsaso had an electricity supply through the government's rural electrification project.

²¹³ Paul Ersah, Bonsa, May 5, 2022.

²¹⁴ Ibid. Dick Hawk was an electrical and mechanical engineer at the Bonsa Tyre Company.

²¹⁵ Rose Danquah, Bonsa, May 3, 2022.

²¹⁶ Obed Kofi Amoah, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 4, 2022.

The impact and legacies of the company on the community and peoples is aptly captured in the statement by one respondent, “It hurts a lot when I recall the memories of the company.”²¹⁷ This statement reflects the deep-seated frustrations of Bonsaso residents as a result of the challenging experiences that followed the closure of the Bona Tyre Company. By 2000, Bona Tyre Company had been completely shut down, awaiting private investment. The remaining workforce was laid off. The social consequence of this was nothing short of what was described in a 1994 report on the privatization of state-owned enterprises in Ghana. Citing how dire the situation could be, E. A. Agbodo stated that

...the social consequences of divestiture may be very serious because in several state-owned enterprises, the firms were the major employers in the town or village and the wholesale redundancy of employees would be very disastrous for the social wellbeing of the local community.²¹⁸

P. B. Arththiabah also highlighted a number of these consequences, including the following; retrenched workers lost their lives in frustration; upsurge in broken marriages as a result of job loss and children of broken marriages dropped out of school; laid-off workers find it difficult to foot their medical bill for themselves and their families; accommodation and rent problems have compelled some workers to return to their home towns.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Amatus, Bona, May 4, 2022. Amatus worked as general worker at the Banbury (the mixing room for all raw materials) and was almost dragged into a mill but managed to escape with severe injuries. In 1992 after his recovery he was transferred to work at the warehouse. Shortly After this transfer he was laid off during the latter part of the rehabilitation of the factory, around 1994. From this period Amatus engaged in agriculture for his sustenance, cultivating food crops and oil palm as well as rearing of pigs. Now he juggles his farm work with another job as contract security officer. Since the labour retrenchment, payment of service termination benefits was delayed until 2003 when the government began the payment but he refused to take the payment. Just like some of his colleagues he felt the payment was too meagre. Hence they filed for legal action but this was futile and their claim remain unpaid to date.

²¹⁸Friedrich Elbert Foundation and Parliament of Republic of Ghana, Privatization of State-Owned Enterprises in Ghana (Accra, 1994), 57.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 77.

Similar consequences as the ones outlined above were confirmed by the lived experiences of residents of Bonsaso. Recounting his experience of the situation a respondent recalled;

My father worked in the tyre room where they produced the tyres...when it collapsed it affected me because the monthly pay was what my father used to cover my school expenses and also catered for his nephews and nieces and his sister.²²⁰

Similarly, another informant narrated;

...Poverty has taken a seat in the community to the extent that when the children completed school, many of the parents could not afford to further their wards' education. It was when the free SHS started that some were able to go. Even now some are still home. When you ask they tell you mom said even if it is free some little things could not be provided; because for many of them, their fathers have died.²²¹

The delayed payment of end-of-service benefits compounded the plight of many ex-workers. A former employee narrated that “many of the workers have also died when they came home and were not paid”.²²² Another former worker also lamented that

We were laid off for about five years without any payment or even a pesewa. Some got sick, others were divorced, some died, and it was overwhelming...when it collapsed it affected me a lot; the electrical work I do, had it not been for galamsey, it would have also gone down. It has been galamsey that has been sustaining us.²²³

Narrating his ordeal, a respondent also added that

...I used to work a lot but I did not do anything apart from cultivating food for my sustenance; cassava, tomatoes and pepper, that was all I did to support myself and it enabled me to live here all this while... Those of us who are not from here, for instance, I am Nzima, When you go back the land had been used for planting coconuts and there was no land for cultivating even cassava. So we are stuck here in our old age...When the whites left, they deceived us that we should go home and that they would pay us, so they gave us letters but they never paid. It was later when Kuffour [former president of Ghana] came to power that he paid our money. I got 11 million cedis, some did not take their share, and they said the money was small. The union said they would ask for an increment as if that was the amount we used to take. But those people never got their money. Those of us who took it used some to buy roofing for our houses.²²⁴

²²⁰ Obed Kofi Amoah, interviewed by Author, Bonsa, May 4, 2022. Obed is a native of Bonsaso and the current Assembly representative of the locality.

²²¹ Rose Danquah, Bonsa, May 3, 2022.

²²² Sarah Amakye, Bonsa, May 5, 2022. Galamsey refers to the illegal small-scale mining activities, particularly in gold-rich areas. It involves the extraction of minerals, especially gold, often using rudimentary tools and methods.

²²³ Samuel Ayim Asare, interviewed by Author, May 4, 2022.

²²⁴ Paul Ersah, Bonsa, May 5, 2022.

From the foregoing narratives, it is clear that the effect of the collapse of the Bonsa Tyre Company has thus been different for many people but it invariably marked a turning point in the Bonsa community as many people were rendered jobless and had to struggle to survive; to take care of their needs as well as their families. Significantly, with the collapse of the Bonsa Tyre Company, many people in the community have resorted to informal Artisanal Small-scale Mining (ASM). Although some individuals were previously involved in informal ASM, the scale of mining activities increased drastically after the collapse of the companies which coincided with the expansion of small-scale mining in the area. This is also characterized by social and environmental problems such as truancy, child labour, teenage pregnancy, environmental pollution, and rising crime and social vices.²²⁵

In addition, the defunct facility has been overtaken by the overgrowth of bushes and this has added to the surge in social problems. The facility has become a hideout for some thieves who steal the electric wiring as well as the movable metal of the factory machines to sell to copper and scrap dealers much to the displeasure of former workers and members of the caretaker team.²²⁶

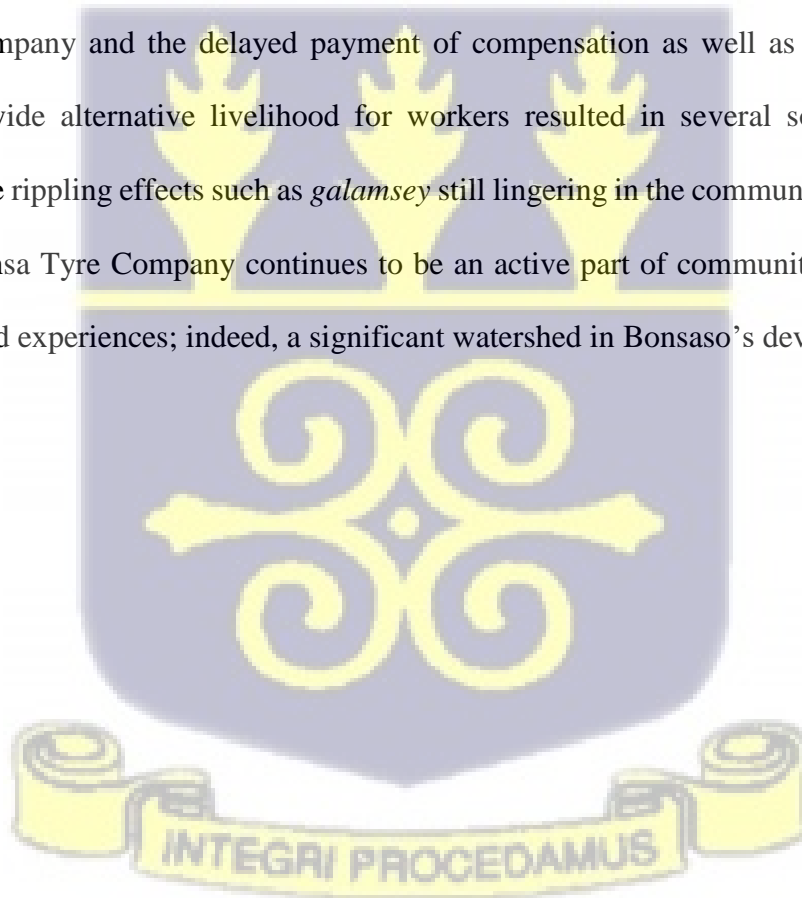
It has been shown in this chapter that the Bonsa Tyre company played a pivotal role in sustaining Ghana's transport industry, especially during the period under review when Ghana's transport problem had become most pronounced. It significantly played an active role in dowsing the challenges that came with the transport of goods and people. The Bonsa Tyre Company

²²⁵ K.J. Bansah et al., "Socioeconomic and Environmental Assessment of Informal Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in Ghana," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 202 (2018): 465-475, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.08.150>.

²²⁶ Presently at the Bonsa Tyre Company is under the watch of a caretaker committee and two security men. Its bungalows still host a number of former workers as well as other non-workers who rent these facilities. It is also home to some cocoa purchasing company which uses a section of its rooms for their business. During my field work my tour of the main factory building could not be done because the two security men and Mr. Opoku Mensah (a former senior staff and member of the caretaker committee) were on a man hunt for scrap thieves somewhere in the bushes.

provided tyres suitable for local conditions contributing to improved driving experience and safety for motorists in Ghana. Motorists could also expect their tyres to last longer, reducing the frequency of replacements and providing cost savings in the long run. Their contribution to public safety by educating and promoting the safe use of tyres was a considerable effort which cannot be overlooked. Moreover, the company created an avenue for employment opportunities for those directly and indirectly involved in its line of activities. Thus contributing to Ghana's labour market.

Regarding the Bonsa community, it led to the socio-economic transformation of both the town and its people. The provision of social amenities such as a medical facility, electricity and transport services helped in the development of the community. Similarly, the shutdown of the Bonsa Tyre Company and the delayed payment of compensation as well as the government's inability to provide alternative livelihood for workers resulted in several social problems in Bonsaso with the rippling effects such as *galamsey* still lingering in the community. Thus although defunct, the Bonsa Tyre Company continues to be an active part of community discourse and a part of their lived experiences; indeed, a significant watershed in Bonsaso's development.



CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY

The overarching objective of this study was to examine the social-economic history of the Bonsa Tyre Factory. This study used information from archives, interviews and secondary literature to construct the history. The time frame of this work covers the 1960s to contemporary times. The period enables a contextual elaboration of the history of the factory and the Bonsaso community. The first chapter is the introduction with sub-components such as the background to the research, literature review, statement of the research problem, research questions, the objectives for the research, significance and justification for the study, source and methodology, and chapter outline

To better appreciate the circumstances around the origin of the Bonsa Tyre Company, the second chapter examined the historical antecedents in Ghana's motor transport development that resulted in the conception and setting up of the tyre factory. It has shown the connection between Ghana's rubber industry with the development of Ghana's motor transport through the Bonsa Tyre Company as part of these antecedents. It was demonstrated in the chapter that rubber was an important resource in the British tyre and motor vehicle industry from the later end of the nineteenth century. Local rubber producers and European rubber plantations in the Gold Coast responded to increasing demands of rubber by the pneumatic tyre industry and British colonial demands during the First and Second World Wars. Yet this did not in any way lead to local tyre manufacturing during this period because wheeled carriages introduced in the 1800s did not have a widespread or practical use to spur local innovation in its wheels with rubber. Besides, investors in Ghana's rubber industry were solely into wild rubber and plantation rubber for export and the colonial administration in the Gold Coast did not encourage local industrial manufacturing.

Consequently, the likelihood of local tyre manufacture in the nineteenth century was highly unlikely.

The conception and development of the need to begin local tyre manufacturing in Ghana emerged out of the challenge of tyre shortages that had bedevilled the motor transport system from its inception around the early twentieth century and its expansion from the 1930s through the 1950s and 1960s. From the beginning of the motor transport industry in the Gold Coast, the limited nature of tyre imports was dowsed by the services of local vulcanizers as well the reuse of old tyres by drivers. But during the Second World War British rubber policy through the Rubber Control Board further worsened the tire problem in Ghana's motor transport industry. The control on the usage of rubber products including vehicle tyres by the Rubber Control led to limited quantities of vehicle tyres and inner tubes in the Gold Coast from 1942. This resulted in the short supply of tyres and an increase in prices of tyres which compelled the colonial administration to implement price control much to the displeasure of tyre dealers in the Gold Coast, particularly Syrian firms who were enjoying some monopoly in the local tyres market as a result of the situation.

The growing need for motor transport in Ghana resulted in a considerable increase in vehicles for the movement of goods and people from the 1950s. Yet the challenge of tyre shortages in the motor transport system was still a persistent problem that had to be resolved in the most economically sustainable manner possible as a part of an import substitution industrial strategy of the Nkrumah government during the 1960s. In a bid to resolve the tyre shortages, the Nkrumah-led CPP government invested in large-scale rubber cultivation as well as promoting its production by cooperatives in Ghana. Rubber became the basis for the establishment of Ghana's tyre manufacturing company, the Bona Tyre Company. Following the establishment of the rubber plantation, plans were made to build a factory that would produce tyres using local rubber under

the terms of an Agreement on Economic Cooperation between Ghana and Czechoslovakia. This arrangement was changed when the CPP government was ousted in a coup by the NLC. The new arrangement was a joint private-government venture with Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company from Akron Ohio.

In chapter three, the discussion was on the establishment of the Bansa Tyre Company. It explored the undercurrents relating to the establishment of the tyre company. It has demonstrated that this process was undergirded by several interests, concerns and technical and practical considerations. The closeness to rubber plantations as well as the availability and nature of the land, closeness to the Bansa River, closeness to the road and railway and pooling of labour to the area, largely determined the siting of the Bansa Tyre Company. It suffices that technical and practical considerations determined the siting of the tyre factory at Bonsaso. Nevertheless, this decision also led to the abandonment of efforts by the Ministry of Industries to establish a rubber processing factory at Prestea. The ministry considered that the Bansa Tyre factory had a rubber processing plant as part of its setup which would serve rubber farmers in the Western region including Prestea and therefore it saw no reason to continue with the Prestea rubber plant.

A challenge with the establishment of the tyre factory was land-related issues. The land became a considerable asset of agency for the chiefs in the locality to contribute to the project, pursue their interest and contest government decisions of the Bansa Tyre Company. This was a result of the changing government and changing position of chiefs significantly within the postcolonial environment where chiefs had regained much control on the administration and appropriation of land in Ghana. For the chief of Bansa, the gift of land and the assistive role he played in the establishment of the company enabled him to contribute to national development while at the same time safeguarding his economic sustenance. Again, riding on this control of land

other chiefs protested the National Liberation Council (NLC) government's transfer of lands to Firestone and accrued revenue from the Firestone company. These depict a concurrent interplay between assisting development as well as ensuring private sustenance and interest. Most importantly a shows a sense of agency by the chiefs in the narrative of the exploitation of the transnational firm, Firestone. Again we also see contending ideas about the running of the Bonsa Tyre Company while the CPP initiative was a state-run tyre company the NLC government tilted towards a joint private-government venture and so the Bonsa Tyre Company was taken over the Firestone company. In the process, the NLC sacrificed the government interest to the expatriate partner.

Finally, the problem of electricity to power the factory also exposed contending ideas about the Bonsa Tyre Company's source of power. The establishment of the tyre factory in a rural area such as Bonsaso compelled the CPP government to consider installing a diesel power plant but to correct what it considered a financially wasteful investment in a diesel power plant, the NLC government eventually asked the Czech export firm to cancel the supply of the diesel plant. At the same time, it showed some of the limitations of the power supply policy which considered only urban and industrial centres during the 1960s.

The fourth chapter discussed the pivotal position of Bonsa Tyre Company in Ghana's motor transport till the 2000s. It was pointed out that Ghana's transport problem kept getting worse in the 1960s. The Bonsa Tyre Company was vital in resolving the challenges associated with the transportation of goods and people through its efforts to sustain tyre manufacture from the beginning of production in 1969 and import to supplement its production, as well as promoting tyre retreading and education for vulcanizers. This ensured a steady supply of tyres to keep automobiles and the economy moving.

The decline of Ghana's Bonsa Tyre Company within the automobile industry was the outcome of a convergence of challenges, including economic constraints, managerial issues, and shifting market dynamics. In the 1970s, economic struggles and foreign exchange limitations hindered access to vital production input, while government decisions diverted foreign exchange away from production, resulting in shortages and a decline in output. Consumer preferences also shifted due to economic hardships, favouring cheaper imported and second-hand tires. This was driven by liberalized trade policies that increased tire imports and weakened the company's market position. Moreover, managerial conflicts and a lack of technical expertise compounded the company's decline. The partnership with Dunlop International also faltered due to financial constraints and failure to train the company's staff.

However, despite its decline and collapse, the company remained significant. The nationalization of the joint rubber-tyre company in 1981 was instrumental in preserving employment opportunities for workers and, more importantly, ensuring a consistent flow of tires into the market amid a period of tire shortages. This underscores the pivotal role the Bonsa Tyre Company played in addressing transportation challenges. Hence, even in its fluctuating performance, the Bonsa Tyre Company held a central role in supporting Ghana's transportation sector from the late 1960s to the 2000s, a crucial contribution without which the nation's transportation system would have struggled to operate effectively.

The fifth Chapter discussed the significance of the Bonsa Tyre Company to Ghana's development. This was done at two levels: first with the motor transport economy and second with the development of the Bonsa community. The Bonsa Tyre company played a key role in sustaining Ghana's transport industry, during the period under review when Ghana's transport problem had become most pronounced. The Bonsa Tyre Company provided tyres suitable for local

conditions contributing to improved driving experience and safety for motorists in Ghana. Motorists could also expect their tyres to last longer, reducing the frequency of replacements and providing cost savings in the long run. Thus the Bonsa Tyre Company significantly played an active role in resolving the challenges that came with the transport of goods and people. Its contribution to public safety by educating and promoting the safe use of tyres was a considerable effort which cannot be overlooked. Moreover, the company created an avenue for employment opportunities for those directly and indirectly involved in its line of activities. Thus contributing to Ghana's labour market.

It was indicated that moving vehicles in Ghana's motor transport sector through the Bonsa Tyre Company was not exclusive to the socio-economic developments of the locality within which the Company was established. The establishment and production of tyres which began at the tyres factory at Bonsaso and the collapse of the factory had intricate ramifications for the development of the Bonsaso community. The building of the tyre factory in Bonsaso in the 1960s resulted in an influx of migrants to the community, affecting the cost of living and in the long term, its demographic makeup. Furthermore, it restructured the local economy by providing alternative livelihood sources and diversifying economic activities in the Bonsa area. The firms employed the majority of the people in Bonsa and opened up the neighbourhood to more commercial activities. Despite these developments, agricultural activities were affected although they continued to be an important aspect of the local economy engaged in by locals and resident workers. In addition, the Bonsa Tyre Company provided health service and transportation services for workers which was also a dependable source of healthcare and transportation that was utilized by Bonsaso residents. Additionally, an extension of the Bonsa Tyre Company electricity to the community demonstrated how access to such social infrastructure was seen as a marker of exclusivity and prestige within

the community. Again, the dominance of men in the Bonsa Tyre Company made men the link to some of the firm's services such as healthcare in the Bonsaso community, but the emerging ancillary economic activity of food vending was dominated by women. This not only indicates the firm's gender discrepancies but also speaks to Ghana's broader gender inequalities from the 1960s. Nevertheless, food vending by women was a significant complement to the factory's feeding system and provided a wide variety of food choices for workers of the factory to satisfy the taste and energy they needed to work.

The closure of the Bonsa Tyre Company and the delayed payment of compensation, as well as the government's inability to provide alternative employment for workers, caused a plethora of social problems in Bonsaso, with repercussions that are still lingering in the community. It has had a deleterious effect on people's capacity to take care of their health leading to death. It has also led to broken homes and also affected parents' capacity to further their children's education. Former workers have since fallen on agriculture, and previous occupations or entered new trades for sustenance. The folding up of the Bonsa Tyre Company led to the decline of the ancillary commercial activities such as food vending and related trade that had developed. Significantly, with the demise of the Bonsa Tyre Company, many people in the area turned to artisanal small-scale mining. This is also characterized by social and environmental problems such as truancy, child labour, teenage pregnancy, environmental pollution, and crime. Furthermore, attempts to divest the Bonsa Tyre Company since 2010 have been unsuccessful since its closure. As a result, the physical infrastructure has increasingly deteriorated, making its divestiture even more difficult. The facility has since been overrun by bushes, making it a haven for thieves who steal the electric wire as well as the movable metal of the industrial machinery to sell to copper and scrap dealers, much to the displeasure of former workers and residents of Bonsaso.

CONCLUSION

In essence, the key conclusion this study points to is that the introduction of motor vehicles on the Gold Coast during the early 1900s ushered in significant changes in the mobility of people, goods and services. The major consideration is that to be able to move people and goods, pneumatic tyres were critical. One could have all other parts of the vehicle assembled but without the tyres, the vehicle remained stuck and unmovable. The increase in demand for vehicle tyres made the government embark on local tyre manufacturing to resolve the problem. The manufacture of local tyres by the Bonsa Tyre Company to feed Ghana's motor transport industry had significant ramifications for the socio-economic development of Ghana in general and Bonsaso in particular. To date, in the real and imaginary minds of many residents of Bonsaso and those who worked in the Bonsa Tyre Company, they still have the belief that they have played a pivotal role in Ghana's transport history by sustaining Ghana's motor transport system from the 1960s to 2000. This public thought is supported by documentary and archival evidence in this thesis to the effect that the Bonsa Tyre Company indeed played a role in Ghana's transport history within the period under review.

It is important to point out, however, that despite the contribution of Bonsa Tyre company to the transport industry in Ghana, several critical factors contributed to the decline and collapse of the company. They include, balance-of-payments problems and foreign exchange constraints in the 1970s which hindered the company's access to necessary inputs; consumer preference for cheaper second-hand and imported tires and liberalized trade policies which undermined the Bonsa Tyre Company's market position; and internal management conflicts, lack of technical expertise and failed rehabilitation.

It is important at this point to also indicate how distribution politics also played a very significant role in the collapse of Bansa Tyre Company. For example in 1973, barely five years after the Bansa Tyre Company started production, the Tema branch of the Ghana Private Transport Union urged the government to “guard against the tyre politics” which was quite prevalent during the period.²²⁷ This appeal to the government should not be taken lightly because it underlines the extant circumstances that had enveloped the Bansa Tyre Company production and distribution in Ghana’s motor transport sector.

The existing narratives about the Bansa Tyre Company paint an image of an unsuccessful enterprise. Stephen Adei has shown that from the inception of the Company, strengthening technological capability within the company received insufficient attention as a result, the policy reforms of the Structural Adjustment Program aimed primarily at “getting prices right” was insufficient to revive the firm’s flagging performance.²²⁸ Again, Sawyer has shown how the multinational company Firestone which ran the Bansa Tyre Company from 1969 to the 1980s siphoned surplus revenue and stifled local rubber production.²²⁹ While these arguments hold, they both seem to lay much emphasis on the exploitative agenda of the multinational partner. This obscures how extant socio-economic circumstances and practices disrupted the company’s production and distribution network.

From the late 1960s up to the mid-1980s, Ghana’s political, and socio-economic landscape witnessed very turbulent moments. There was severe economic decline leading to high levels of poverty, unemployment and difficult living conditions; political instability as a result of successive coup d’états where the various regimes sought to make it better but eventually made things

²²⁷Ghanaian Times, “Probe tyre shortage, Government Urged”, 1973.

²²⁸ Adei, Technological Capacity, 1501.

²²⁹ Sawyer, Multinational Corporations and Development, 267.

muddier.²³⁰ In these circumstances, social ills festered and multiplied as politicians, soldiers and civilians alike attempted to manoeuvre the precarious realities of the period. There were widespread practices of smuggling, hoarding and profiteering where people used their positions and social connections to implement and perpetuate these illegalities. In the motor transport industry vehicle tyres among other essential products such as fuel and spare parts were also saddled with these socio-economic ills. The instances of stealing and hoarding of tyres were not uncommon. Newspaper headlines showed many instances of scandals and brawls around tyres. For instance, on June 27, 1979, 796 tyres and 206 tyre tubes were seized by the police force at Sunyani from the store of one Emmanuel K. Kyeremeh who was subsequently locked up in cells for hoarding the tyres and refusing to sell. The government even considered bringing the sales of tyres and batteries under the watch of the military to enable consumers to purchase at controlled prices.²³¹ In 1983 two people; an employee of the Accra City Council (ACC) and one other person were arrested and kept in military custody for stealing three tires from one of the vans of the sanitation section of the ACC.²³² These examples are not in any way disconnected instances but a part of the broader socio-economic environment within which the Bonsa Tyre Company's distribution was run, an integral part of the tyre politics.

The Bonsa Tyre Company's production and distribution were also affected by these practices where some dealers and sales agents sold at inflated prices to the unsuspecting motorist. This was indicated in various Bonsa Tyre Company advertisements in the 1970s urging motorists to purchase its products at controlled prices from only authorized dealers dispersed across the various regions of the country (see Figure 6). Drivers could demand the list of tyres and tubes and

²³⁰ Kwaku Gyening Owusu, "Military Coups in Ghana, 1969-1985: A By-product of Global Economic Injustice?" (Sweden: Linkoping Universitet, Masters theses, 2008).

²³¹ *Daily Graphic*, "Tyres army may supervise sales", Monday January 15, 1979.

²³² *Ghanaian Times*, "Two Caught Stealing tyres from ACC van", July 11, 1983.

their respective prices to avoid being cheated. Again to forestall unequal distribution to the motorist, tyres were to be mounted directly to the vehicle of the buyer. However, even with this measure in place the sales and distribution were not sacrosanct. For instance, drivers reported instances where tyres were carried away by a customer from the depot instead of getting mounted on the vehicle. Moreover, some managers deliberately denied having in stock particular kinds of tyres and had a list of patron drivers they called to come for such tyres while others waited futilely in long queues for their turn.²³³

As the demand for tyres outstripped the supply, distribution had to be rationed. This was accompanied by shady practices such as inequitable distribution of tyres, hoarding and profiteering which further plunged motor transport into further disarray sometimes forcing drivers to the brink of anarchy. For instance, in January 1979, the Tema Taxi Drivers Union threatened to impound tyres loaded from the Tema harbour and sell them at controlled prices under the supervision of the police. The union felt this action would be necessary to resolve how tyres carted to Accra seemed to disappear, while their vehicles remained grounded as a result of the short supply and high cost of tyres. This grievance stemmed from the fact that tyres imported during the previous year were distributed without equity. The drivers also pointed to the dominance of middlemen and the black market in the sales of tyres and other spare parts as the cause of high prices of such goods leading to increased prices of transport for the masses. The prices of tyres had risen as high as 400 cedis higher than the cost of spare parts.²³⁴

This practice was also used by the company's workers to establish their resentment about their conditions of service. On November 11, 1980, the Member of Parliament for Wassu West

²³³*Ghanaian Times*, "Deal at Firestone Depot Alarm drivers", August 13, 1980.

²³⁴*Daily Graphic* "Union threatens to seize tyres", January 9, 1979.

intervened to curtail the occurrence of a possible violent clash between the top expatriate management and the senior Ghanaian management staff who were brandishing clubs and stones. The confrontation was spurred by what workers perceived as an act of victimization leading to the dismissal of some workers when workers called for a probe into the distribution of tyres in the previous month. Although workers pointed to the unequal representation of Ghanaians at the top echelon of management, the underlying cause of this confrontation was the deteriorating conditions of service. Workers complained that their poor conditions of service had affected morale and therefore productivity. This resulted in a fall in production from 38,000 a month to 24,000.²³⁵

In 1983, during the revolutionary fervour, the PNDC administration in conjunction with the Bona Tyre Company took aggressive but rather detailed bureaucratic measures to deter perpetrators from any form of possible diversions. In the Ashanti region, the regional administration gave several directives; individuals who needed tyres were to apply and have their letters endorsed by their People's Defense Councils (PDC) or Workers Defense Councils (WDC); the Bona Tyre Company was to give direct allocation to institutions; Armed Forces and Police personnel were to apply through their commander to the regional secretary; drivers with grounded vehicles were to apply through the Private road Transport Union and the local PDC; heavy duty and tractor tires were to be supplied directly; and list of individuals and institutions were to be forwarded to the regional administration after every consignment.²³⁶ Additionally, the rations were to be sold on different days for various categories of people. Representatives from the forces, schools and hospitals would be served on Monday, and Tuesday for other public institutions and

²³⁵ *Ghanaian Times*, "Firestone's white Ghanaian Managers Nearly Clash", November 11, 1980.

²³⁶ As part of the PNDC policy of transforming the Ghanaian society and ensuring direct participation of the masses in the governance of the country the PDCs and WDCs were established as "revolutionary bodies" within local communities and work places respectively as vanguards of the national and democratic struggle.

corporations, Wednesday for dealers, Thursday for private institutions and Fridays for the general public.²³⁷ This arrangement also came with its challenges in that it gave the WDC and their cronies room to equally perpetuate the same malpractices they were meant to guard against. Barely a year later in 1984, the government issued a directive that the WDCs at various branches be made independent from the WDC's executives at Bona and that no tyres should be sold under the authority of the WDC executives.²³⁸

The Bona Tyre Company's distribution activities reveal the extant socio-economic practices of smuggling, profiteering and unequal distribution which had enveloped tyre use and distribution and were reinforced by the fall in the company's tyre production. In this regard, several measures such as assigning authorized tyre dealers and direct mounting of tyres at sale points, and tyre rationing in conjunction with the government were implemented. These remedies were however ineffective, contributing to the disruption of the firm's supply and distribution network. This contributed to the shortages and delayed supply. Consequently, the company's inability to meet customer demand led to the loss of its market share in Ghana's tyre market particularly when other tyre companies were competing for the tyre market.

The Bona Tyre Company represents a notable effort in industrialization in Ghana and Africa by adding value to Ghana's rubber through tyre manufacturing. The Bona Tyre Company can be related to other factories in Ghana and Africa that have faced similar problems of under-utilization, inefficiency, technological stagnation, policy inconsistency, and foreign competition. Some of these factories include the Dabose paper processing, jute, shoe, glass factories, meat processing factory, canneries for fruits and tomatoes, and a radio assembly plant, all established in

²³⁷ *Ghanaian Times* "PDCs to Help Sell Tyres in Ashanti", July 5, 1983.

²³⁸ *Ghanaian Times*, "7 Bona officials exonerated", June 18, 1984.

the 1960s, but have suffered a similar fate. These factories were part of Ghana's import substitution industrialization strategy, which aimed to diversify the economy, reduce imports, and promote economic growth, but failed to achieve these objectives due to various internal and external factors.

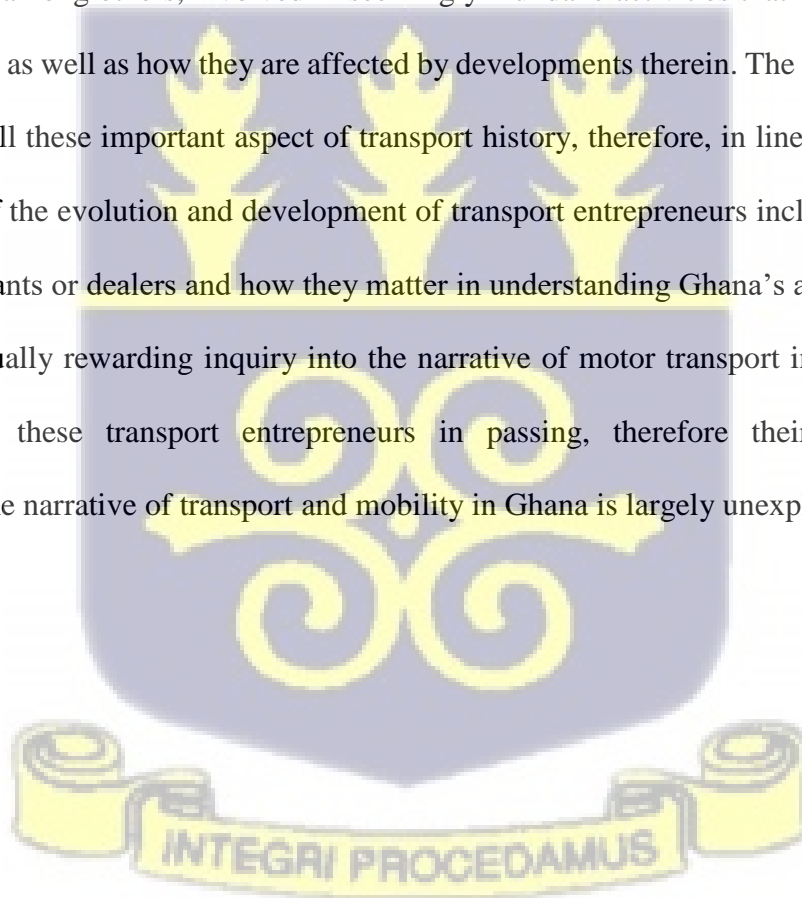
Ghana is still facing some of the same challenges that affected the Bona Tyre Company and other factories, such as the lack of technological capacity, the dependence on foreign markets and inputs, the volatility of commodity prices, and the competition from cheaper imports.²³⁹ However, Ghana is currently implementing a new industrial policy (one district one factory initiative) that focuses on local industries engaged in value-added processing of its natural resources.²⁴⁰ The narrative of the Bona Tyre Company is a valuable landmark in Ghana's history to learn from. In particular, this study has shown that the failure to develop and sustain the industrial base of Ghana has a direct link with current underdevelopment which is manifesting in social, economic and environmental challenges. For instance, the shutdown of the company and the delayed payment of compensation resulted in social problems in Bonsaso with rippling effects such as galamsey which is still lingering in the community. It thus emphasizes the need for current and future efforts towards industrialization to consider the social and environmental impacts of industrial development and ensure that the benefits are shared with the local communities and workers. It also points to the need to invest in technological capacity and innovation to improve productivity, quality, and competitiveness of local industries. And finally it highlights the need to balance the interests and roles of the state, the private sector, the foreign investors, and local communities in industrial development and ensure a fair and mutually beneficial partnership. The

²³⁹ Lindsay Whitfield, "Conclusion: Can Industrial Policy Work in Ghana?" in *Economies after Colonialism: Ghana and the Struggle for Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 309-328, doi:10.1017/9781108545877.011.

²⁴⁰ Ama Nyamekye Obenewa Otoo, "Assessment of Industrial Policies in Ghana: A Case Study on the Current Policy of One District One Factory Policy (1D1F)" (master's thesis, Western Michigan University, 2023), 5370, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/174276>

successes and failures of the Bansa Tyre Company and other defunct industries in Ghana are therefore practical experience which should guide current and future attempts at industrialization in Ghana and Africa.

The story of the evolution and development of Ghana's Bansa Tyre Company so far has shown the intricate connections between Ghana's motor transport industry, the rubber industry as well and the development of the Bonsaso community. It is correct to say that the narratives of transport and mobility or immobility in Ghana as has been shown is and should also be about other subsidiary and/or allied industries and people in the background; agriculture, firms, communities, informal groups among others, involved in seemingly mundane activities that keep transport and mobility moving as well as how they are affected by developments therein. The focus of this study cannot include all these important aspect of transport history, therefore, in line with this study, a detailed study of the evolution and development of transport entrepreneurs including vulcanizing and tyres merchants or dealers and how they matter in understanding Ghana's automobile history would be an equally rewarding inquiry into the narrative of motor transport in Ghana. Existing literature treats these transport entrepreneurs in passing, therefore their significance to understanding the narrative of transport and mobility in Ghana is largely unexplored.



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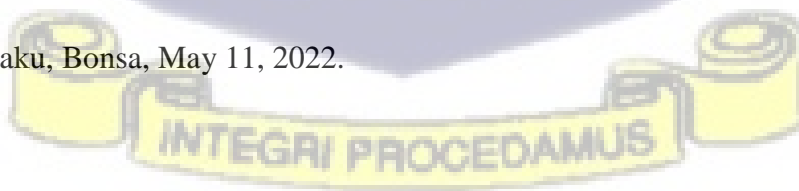
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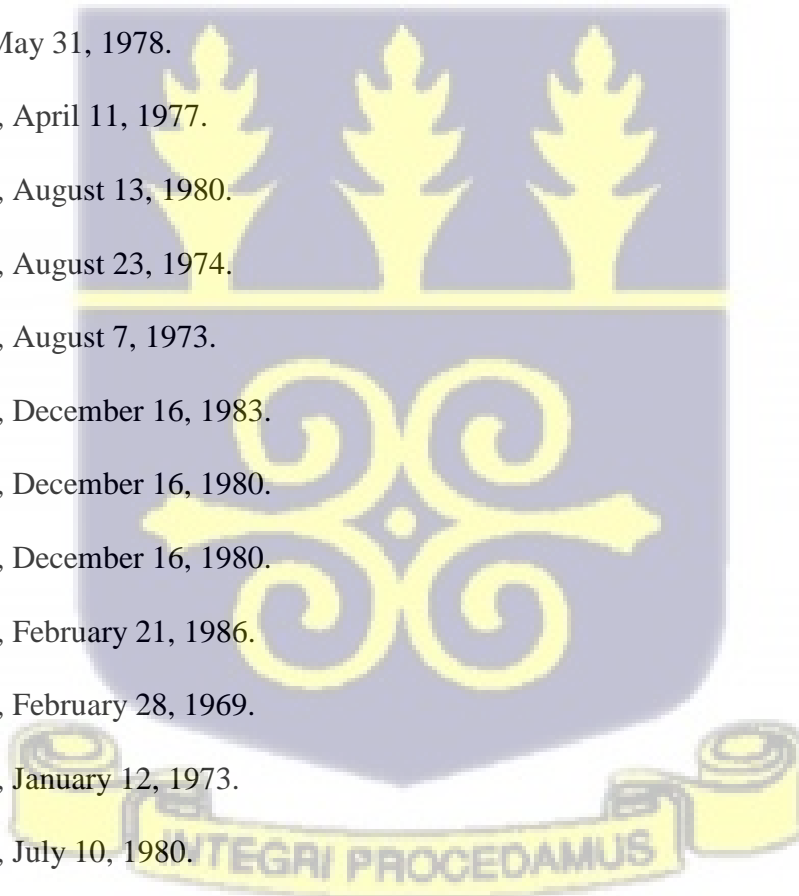
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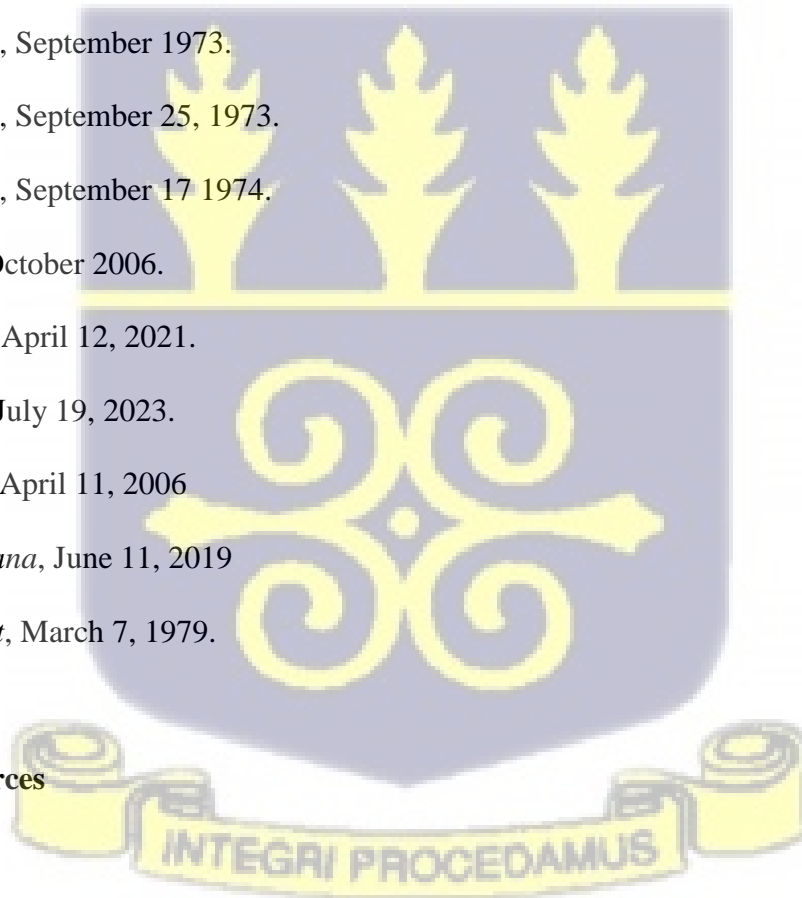
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