

Original Article

Mining and conflict in the Akyem Abuakwa Kingdom in the Eastern Region of Ghana, 1919–1938



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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the conflict involving the *Okyenhene* Ofori Atta I and two of his subordinate chiefs, Kwaku Amoah of Asamankese and Odikro Kwame Kuma of Akwatia, in colonial Ghana. Popularly referred to in Ghanaian historiography as the “Asamankese Crisis”, this conflict was triggered by the discovery and subsequent exploitation of diamonds in the township of Akwatia. It is argued that the quest for resource control in the Akyem Abuakwa traditional area proved to be a major driver of social conflicts in Ghana during the period under study.

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1. Introduction

Ghana one of the few countries in West Africa perceived to be an oasis of peace in a region otherwise characterised by civil wars, rebel activities and general instability. But this image about only masks a festering wound of communal violence, inter-ethnic conflicts and armed confrontations in the northern part of the country. Since 1980, Northern Ghana has witnessed intermittent eruptions of either intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic conflicts. There have been wars fought between the Nanumba and the Konkomba in 1981, 1994 and 1995; between the Bimoba and the Konkomba in 1984, 1986 and 1989; between the Nawuri and the Gonja in 1991 and 1992; and between the Konkomba, Nawuri, Basari and the Nchumuru on the one hand and the Gonja on the other hand in 1992 (Mbowura, 2012).

The north, however, is not the only place in Ghana where conflicts have or tended to erupt. Notably, the quest for resource control in the gold-aggregated and diamondiferous areas in the south has triggered social conflicts during the country's pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. This paper contributes to this debate by providing a detailed analysis of resource control in the Akyem Abuakwa traditional area, a major mining-related disputed which occurred in Ghana during the colonial period. Here, the discovery of diamonds ‘ignited’ a conflict between Nana Ofori

Atta (the paramount chief of Akyem Abuakwa) and Kwaku Amoah, the chief of Asamankese, who at the time served under Ofori Atta in the colonial hierarchy. Both Ofori Atta and Amoah claimed the right to grant concessions and extract royalties arising from the diamond discovery. Amoah was joined by several allies, most notably, Kwame Kuma of Akwatia, the chief of Accra (the Ga Mantse), the colonial capital, and the sub-chiefs of two subdivisions of Accra (Osu and James Town). The crisis escalated when Amoah and Kuma declared their intentions to secede from Akyem Abuakwa.

The crisis was defused by the colonial administration. It came to Ofori Atta's aid by implementing the Asamankese Division Stool Treasury Ordinance (ADRO), which stripped Amoah of his control over the Asamankese Treasury and placed it into the hands of the colonial government. The colonial government made the correct decision because Ofori Atta had a legitimate traditional claim to the land and natural resources of Akyem Abuakwa. Kwaku Amoah, however, was an unscrupulous chief who defied tradition for personal gain. In this project he was assisted by a group of Western-educated lawyers from a nationalist organisation, the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA). Similar to Amoah, the lawyers were motivated by self-interests and disrespectful towards tradition.

2. Methodology and study location

The study uses a historiographical approach that combines the use of primary and secondary data sources in a complementary

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Table 1
A glossary of important words.

Term	Meaning
Okyenhene	The Paramount ruler (Chief) of the Akyem Abuakwa Kingdom. In this paper, the use of the word Okyenhene refers expressly to Nana Ofori Atta I
Benkumhene	The Chief of the left division of Akyem Abuakwa
Akwamuhene	The Paramount Chief of the Akwamu traditional area
Apesemaka	A branch of the Asamankese Asafo who opposed the reign of Okyenhene Ofori Atta I
D.C.	District Commissioner (a British colonial official)
Omanhene	Paramount ruler of a traditional Akan state

manner. These data were supplemented by oral data collected through field work. The bulk of the primary, mainly archival, data were derived from documents preserved in the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Accra and Koforidua, as well as in the Akyem Abuakwa State Archives (AASA) at the Kyebi Royal Palace (see Table 1 presents an overview of the cast of characters presented in this paper).

3. Location of Akyem Abuakwa

Modern Akyem territory comprises over 3120 square miles of land (Addo-Fening, 1988). It shares borders with Kwahu to the north and north-west and with Krobo, New Dwaben and Akwapim to the east and south-east. In the South, Akyem Abuakwa borders Agona and in the West, Akyem Kotoku. Stretching from Gyegyeti and Kankang in the north to Adeiso in the south-west, Akyem Abuakwa spans the Nsawam-Nkawakaw railway with the greater part of the state lying west of it (Fig. 1). Akyem consists of three subdivisions: Abuakwa, Kotoku and Bosome. The largest sub division, Abuakwa, occupies about two-thirds of Akyem territory and measures approximately 1870 square miles. (Addo-Fening, 1997; Gold Coast Review 1(1) 1925; Debrunner, 1967). Kotoku and Bosome share the remaining one-third to the west. Akyem Abuakwa's population in 2000 was estimated at 1,160,000 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010).

4. Context

During their period of migration from Adanse to Bansa and their subsequent occupation between the Pra and the Birem valley, the Akyem “acquired” a region which was both auriferous and diamondiferous. Some classic European texts portray Akyem Abuakwa as a primary source of gold (Jenkins, 1972). For example, in his writings, Macdonald (1896) simply refers to Akyem Abuakwa as “auriferous Akim”: by 1852, gold mining had, indeed, become a principal source of livelihood for the Abuakwa people. Moreover, according to Cruickshank (1858), within the same period, some parts of Abuakwa were reportedly as “prolific as Ashantee in gold production”. Between 1925 and 1939, the Consolidated African Selection Trust Company's plant, located at Akwatia, produced approximately 3,000,000 karats of gold at mines around Akwatia and Asubone, from a plot of 3.04 km² (Junner, 1943). Such an enormous endowment of mineral wealth made Akyem the envy of neighbouring states, especially Akwamu, which was already an imperial power to the south with an equally ambitious inclination to control trade. Finding it very difficult to conquer Akyem through arms, the Akwamu resorted to implementing harsh economic policies which indirectly granted them control of the gold trade at the expense of Akyem producers (Wilks, 1957; Dumehasie, 1997).

Akyem responded to this economic blockade by taking up arms. The numerous wars that ensued between the two states, therefore, eventually resulted in the decisive defeat of Akwamu

in 1730 (Wilks, 1957). By virtue of this victory, all Akwamu territories became integrated into the larger Abuakwa State, including such towns as Asamankese, Akwatia, Akyease, Tafo and Kwaman. The Abuakwa Kingdom extended from the River Pompom in the east, to the Pra in the west, and from the Kwahu boundary in the north, to the Densu River in the south.

All of these lands were governed by one customary law, the Abuakwa land tenure system, under which, the *Okyenhene* has the right of ownership of Abuakwa tribal lands for the paramount stool of the state. The sub-chiefs also claimed immediate control and administration of their stool lands. A citizen's title to his fallow [*mfuwa*] or *Asefia* (site of ruined building) remained inviolable subject to the exigencies of the state. The *Okyenhene's* role as the custodian and administrator of all Okyeman lands was duly acknowledged by all and sundry and thus reflected in the wealth sharing customary practices of Abuakwa: he was entitled to a portion of a snail harvest known as *Awafee* and leg of game (*Bosre*), one-third share of *Ahudee* (treasure trove), and one-third share of *Epo* (a nugget of gold valued upwards of £2). In the case of *Epo* and *Ahudee*, the two-thirds share goes to the discoverer and the stool occupant who owns the land (Dumehasie, 1997).

4.1. The rise of diamond mining in Akyem Abuakwa

This section provides a detailed account of the dynamics of the conflict which the discovery and mining of diamonds in Akyem Abuakwa spawned. The rise of industrial mining in Abuakwa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries threatened not only this time-honoured customary practice but more significantly, political, economic and other social institutions. The European mining and prospecting firms negotiated for concessions and paid rents and royalties directly to stool occupants without reference to the *Okyenhene*. This ignited what would become a protracted dispute between the Paramount Stool and the Chief of Asamankese, a conflict often referred to as the *Asamankese Dispute*. It was one of the most celebrated cases arising from the politics of land alienation. This was not unprecedented but it was undoubtedly the most serious and protracted crisis in the history of Akyem Abuakwa.

Tradition has it that, during the seventeenth century, a party of refugees from Adanse led by one Ofori Panin settled in the area to the north of the Birem River in what is now Akyem Abuakwa (Addo-Fening, 1975). At the time of their arrival, most of the modern Akyem Abuakwa was a part of the Akwamu Empire, with its capital at Nyanoase. Asamankese was then an important town, in which the stool was next in position to that of the king of Akwamu (Wilks, 1957).

The Akyem were settled on the western border of the Akwamu Empire; and, from the mid-seventeenth century, they began to threaten the integrity of that empire through a series of incursions into its northern districts (Addo-Fening, 1975). The Akyem exerted the pressure on this north-western border until 1730 when, acting in alliance with mutinous subjects of Akwamu, they overran the entire western section of the empire, including the original Akwamu country which was thus lost forever to the Akwamu stool (Addo-Fening, 1975). The Ofori Panin (Paramount) Stool, under whose leadership the wars were fought, claimed ownership of the conquered Akwamu lands, and took “possession of all the Aquamboe Crows” (EFC Notes).¹ Asamankese, which formed a part of the vanquished Akwamu territory, was integrated into the Akyem state and came to be placed under the *Oseawuo* Wing of the kingdom. A cordial relationship ensued between the Ofori Panin Stool and the Stool of Asamankese. For a

¹ Dispatch from Apam (Gawron), 17 September, E.F.C. Notes, 214. Deposited at the Department of History Library, University of Ghana, Legon.

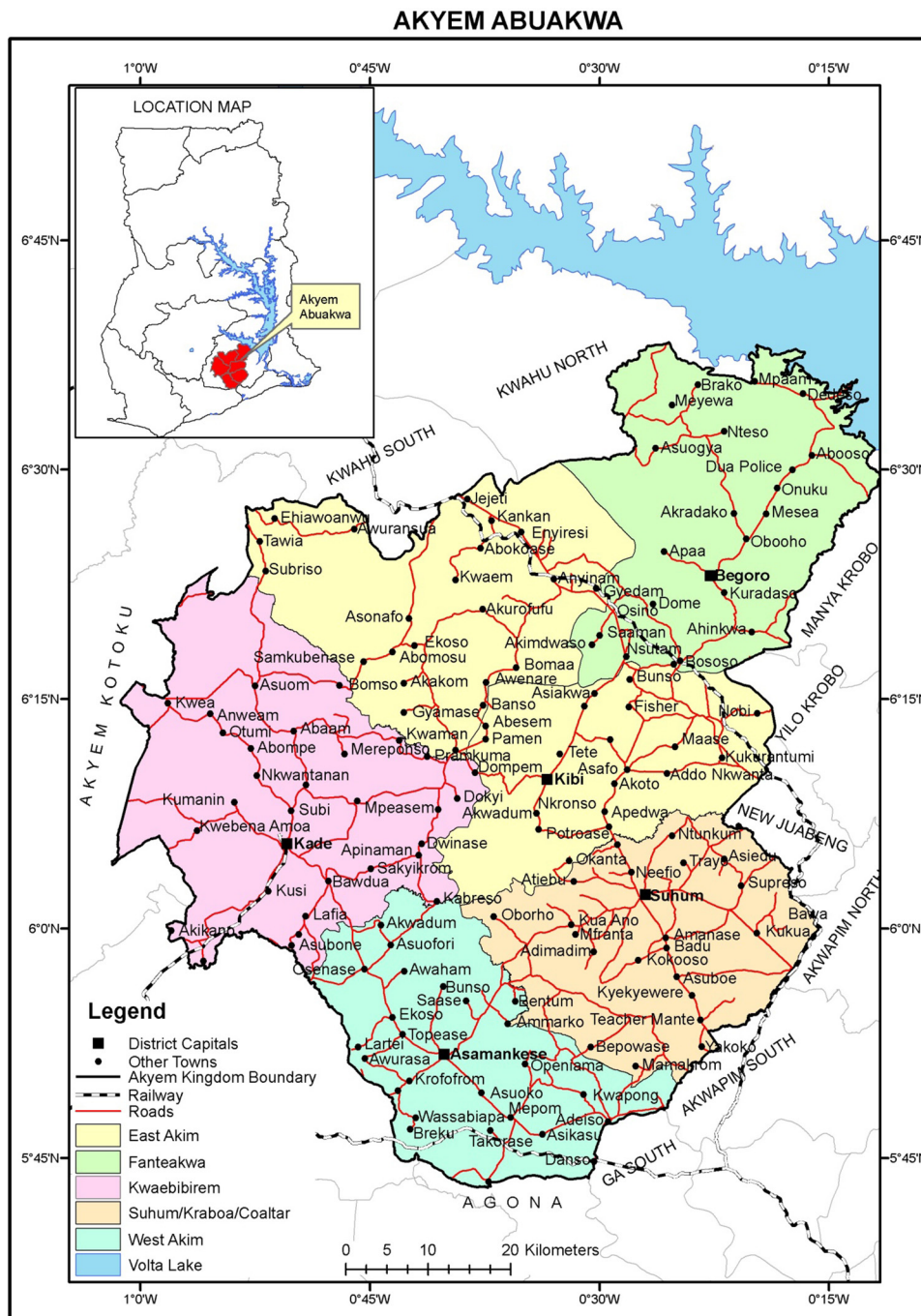


Fig. 1. A map showing Akyem Abuakwa state.
 Source: Adapted from Kwakye (2007).

period of about two centuries, the Asamankese stool was represented in the Akyem Abuakwa State Council (Okyeman Council).

The arrival of European mining companies in Akyem Abuakwa did not create precedent as far as the concept of land alienation was concerned. As Hill (1963) explains, “it must be accepted as a historical fact that the notion, if not the practice of selling land to strangers has been familiar to many Akim Abuakwa chiefs for at least a century”. Thus, in the Akyem Abuakwa Kingdom, the migrant cocoa farmers and gold mining companies had laid down the rules by which land could be leased or bought, before the arrival of European diamond mining companies. Hill’s work has shown the processes by which the migrant cocoa farmers of Southern Ghana acquired land.

Following the introduction of industrial mining in Akyem Abuakwa in 1897, reckless alienation of stool lands reached a peak, as the state was inundated by prospective concessionaires. According to estimates, in the 1920s, one-third of total land area in the state was being used for mining activities.² From a relatively modest beginning in 1900, the number of mining companies in the territory increased astronomically. Initial grants to gold prospecting firms increased with the discovery of diamonds in Abomosu in 1919. Additional discoveries of alluvial deposits of diamonds occurred in Kade and Oda (Junner, 1943). Following these discoveries and certification of their viability, the number of mining companies in the territory increased.

² Governor’s Address at Kibi, 28 Dec. 1933 PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/17779.

The first concession in Akyem Abuakwa was owned by Akim Limited (about 5 square miles) and was granted to the Castle Gold Exploration Syndicate Limited at Asiakwa and Samang on 2 April 1897.³ The Muoso concession was also granted to the Goldfields of Eastern Akim in December 1899.⁴ Between 1897 and 1900, eight concessions were released in Akyem Abuakwa, mainly to the Goldfields of Eastern Akim Limited. Among these were the Asiakwa and Samang concessions and the Pano, Ahwenease, Adadientem, Nsutam, Agyapomaa and Sadwumase concessions.⁵

Besides gold, diamond mining concessions were taken up in Akyem Abuakwa. The origins of the diamond mining industry in Akyem Abuakwa date back to February 1919, when the Director of the Gold Coast Geological Survey, A.E. Kitson, together with E. Teale, discovered several diamond deposits near Abomosu in Akyem Abuakwa (Kitson, 1919).⁶ Additional discoveries of alluvial diamonds were made in Kade and Oda and the Birem Valley (The Ghana Chamber of Mines Annual Report, 1961–1962). The first diamond mining leases were obtained in December 1919 by the Goldfields of Eastern Akim Company, which had been holding concessions in Eastern Akyem during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The first discoveries in the Bonsa Diamond Fields located about 100 miles to the south-west of the Birem were reported in 1921. Following these discoveries and proof of their commercial viability, a new company, the African Selection Trust Limited (AST), was formed to harvest the deposits. In 1922, it commenced business after signing an agreement with the chief of Akwatia, Odikro Kwame Kuma, in September (CAST Annual Report, 1972).

The discovery of diamonds at Akwatia in 1919 by officers at the Geological Survey Department of the Gold Coast, however, caused tension between Asamankese and the Paramount Stool.⁷ Specifically, this development caused land value to increase suddenly, enriched the Asamankese and Akwatia chiefs, and led to destructive conflicts between the *Okyenhene* and these two chiefs. The European mining and prospecting firms negotiated for concessions and paid rents and royalties directly to the two chiefs, bypassing the *Okyenhene* or the paramountcy. This threatened the time-honoured customary practices in place, such as the land tenure system, as well as affected Abuakwa's political and social institutions, which nearly disintegrated the state. The sharp rise in the value of land, brought about by the activities of concessionaires, was responsible for several developments in Abuakwa, which will be discussed further here.

The discovery of diamonds at Akwatia in 1919 did raise hopes of economic prosperity in Kyebi, the capital of Akyem Abuakwa. Two plausible reasons accounted for this. First, the mineral deposits were all located in areas which were under the political and economic domain of the Paramount Chief of the Akyem Abuakwa

Traditional Area; and, as the immemorial customary practice of Abuakwa demanded, the *Okyenhene* could, therefore, expect his one-third share of all the revenues accruing from the various diamond transactions on his land (Dumehasie, 1997). Secondly, the heart of the diamond discovery zone lay in an area whose chief Kwaku *Okyenhene* Amoah of Asamankese and Odikro Kwame Kuma of Akwatia had served the with an unflinching loyalty and support. The *Okyenhene*, therefore, was optimistic about receiving his entitlements. But this was not to be, because of a sudden change of heart and attitude of the Asamankese royals. Kwaku Amoah and Kwame Kuma obstinately refused to admit that the *Omanhene* had any entitlement to a share of the diamond profits and it was when the conflict heightened that Kwaku Amoah embarked on his secessionist course, by informing the *Okyenhene*, on 27 June 1921, of his intention to withdraw from the Okyeman Council. What led to this action?

When Nana Ofori Atta I became the Paramount Chief of Akyem Abuakwa in 1912, one of his major preoccupations was to end the reckless alienation of Abuakwa lands. He made an initial effort to define property rights in the state; in 1913, Okyeman Council established a by-law. Ofori Atta's version of customary law promised to give the Paramount Stool and its occupant a larger portion of the state's income. Under the *status quo*, most of the revenue in the state flowed from the sale of land. Because the Paramount Stool could not enforce its right to a one-third tribute, it gained little. Under the new property rights system, most revenue would be derived from productive investment on the land. If the Paramount Stool could capture a portion of that revenue in the form of tax, then the stool would be guaranteed a stance, expanding its sources of long term income (Firmin-Sellers, 1996). In 1915, he convened a meeting at Kyebi where he prevailed upon the Okyeman Council to resolve unanimously to reserve for the Abuakwa people and "to future generations the few portion of lands which has not been alienated".⁸ As a first step, Nana Ofori Atta, with the consent of the Okyeman Council, placed an advertisement in the press. The advert forbade the alienation of any portion of Abuakwa land "in any shape or form" without the prior approval of the "Odikro of the place and the Omanhene" of Eastern Akim.⁹ It further prohibited citizens from mortgaging their cocoa farms as security for any purpose whatsoever without proper authority (Addo-Fening, 1987).

Critics of Nana Ofori Atta, especially Rathbone (1996), question the idea of primordial tradition and argue that Ofori Atta was concerned with centralising his personal power and that he used tradition as a tool for his personal project. The extraordinary judgement of the Okyeman Council in November 1921 that "We know that the Omanhene of Akim Abuakwa is the owner of all Akim stool lands" was the culmination of a longer campaign to establish his authority upon the basis of one of the many possible readings of tradition. It was, of course, the proximate cause of the attempted secession of Asamankese and Akwatia in 1921 (Rathbone, 1996). But it also angered other rulers of Akwamu origin, especially the Tafohene, who resented the encroachment of the authorities in Kyebi upon which they had defined as time-hallowed local autonomy, especially when this limited their chances of making money. Rathbone's argument questions the idea whether "timeless tradition" exists. According to the author, Ofori Atta had no right to claim traditional authority over Asamankese. In fact, it is interesting to note that Ofori Atta's version of tradition mirrors a great deal the ideas of J.B. Danquah, a "Western" educated lawyer who produced a book on Akyem Abuakwa tradition which served the political purpose of legitimating the paramount supposedly primordial control over the kingdom.

Moreover, the royal family had scarcely any land in Akyem Abuakwa which came directly under its control and was therefore

³ Colonial Secretary to Ag. C.E.P., 4 March 1925, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 29/6/42, 81.

⁴ Arbitration Award, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 28; also see, C.E.P.'s Documents on Muoso Concessions, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 29/6/42, 81.

⁵ Arbitration Award, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 28; also see, Colonial Secretary to Ag. C.E.P., PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 29/6/42, 81. The Ashanti and Gold Coast Mining Corporation Limited re-opened the Kyebi Mine on 15 June 1936. See, Diary of D.C. Birrim for February 1934, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 26/6/49, 19. The Ashanti and Gold Coast Mining Corporation Limited re-opened the Kyebi Mine on 15 June 1936 (ADM 26/6/49).

⁶ See also, Native Affairs Annual Report for 1919, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1420, 38.

⁷ In February 1919, the Director of the Gold Coast Geological Survey, A.E. Kitson, together with E. Teale discovered several diamond deposits near Abomosu and also some 30.4 kilometres north-east of Akwatia (Boahen, 1975). Additional discoveries of alluvial deposits of diamonds were made in Kade and Oda and the Birem Valley. Following these discoveries, the African Selection Trust Ltd. (CAST) was formed to mine the deposits. It commenced business on 26 September, 1922 after signing an agreement with Barimah Kwaku Amoah, the chief of Asamankese and Odikro Kwame Kuma of Akwatia, with a consideration fee of £1200.

⁸ Explanatory Remarks, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1197, 73.

⁹ Explanatory Remarks, ADM 11/1/1197, 75.

unable to act as a direct vendor. The *Okyenhene* could only net a share of the profits on land commoditisation and commercialisation via rent taxation and by in effect taxing the land sales of others. Faced with these developments, the ruling dynasty took steps to centralise the kingdom in order to re-establish social control over the chiefs and commoners. In the process, the relative autonomy of wing chiefs was eroded. This proved to be a manipulative device aimed at preserving social capital in his kingdom (Grischow, 2008; Grischow and McKnight, 2008). The preservation of bonding social capital in Akyem Abuakwa also relied on the threat of force backed by the coercive power of the state, made possible by the Native Administrative Ordinance (NAO) of 1927 (Berry, 2001). Section 123 of the NAO empowered State Councils to draw up “native land custom”.

As the Okyeman Council dominated by an unusually skilful *Okyenhene* had insisted upon its own authority in matters concerning land, it unsurprisingly tended to judge in its own favour. The lawyers themselves were divided over the issue of tradition versus modernity and the fair allocation of resources. J.B. Danquah made it clear that the agents of customary law rested entirely on the Paramount Chief and his State Council, the District Administration and the Governor (Simensen, 1975). On the other hand, Kobina Sekyi accused Ofori Atta of manipulating traditional law and custom, which marginalised his divisional chiefs, thus proving himself to be an autocrat. He went to say that Ofori Atta applied the Native Administration Ordinance for the settlement of a longstanding political dispute – in other words, an unscrupulous chief exploited a pernicious ordinance to the detriment of his people (Edsman, 1979). Kwaku Amoah accused Ofori Atta of importing alien customs into Abuakwa customary practices for his own personal aggrandisement and to manipulate the subordinate chiefs.¹⁰ Upon his ascension as *Okyenhene* in 1912, Ofori Atta envisaged a local command economy which would be dominated by an aristocrat who, he argued, had the right to exert control of – and for all intents and purposes, own – the major means of production in the kingdom, namely land.¹¹

Several scholars have reflected on these developments. For example, Simensen's (1975) work on Akyem Abuakwa focuses on local politics and conflict during Ofori Atta's reign and the response of British colonial policy to this development. The author argues that Ofori Atta's attempt to centralise his personal power and control the resources of Asamankese and Akwatia brought about the conflict between the *Okyenhene* and the two chiefs. Edsman (1979) holds the view that after 1927, the crisis was in “essence an Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) campaign against the Native Administrative Ordinance, Ofori Atta and the Constitution which excluded the educated elite”. Holmes (1926) accuses Kobina Sekyi and the lawyers of intentionally prolonging the crisis for their own benefits. Li (1993), a Chinese historian, views it as a protest of the “small against the big”, and Addo-Fening (1975: 64), who has perhaps studied Akyem Abuakwa history more than any contemporary scholar, traces the origins of the dispute, suggesting that the cause of conflict was “a wrangle between Ofori Atta and the two chiefs over matters of title and interest in the Asamankese and Akwatia lands”.

The present article builds upon views put forward by Simensen (1975), arguing that the discovery of diamonds at Akwatia brought about the Asamankese crisis. It furthermore contests that this conflict was compounded by the involvement of the states of Akwamu, Akuapem, Ga, Krobo and some Gold Coast lawyers due to their vested economic interests in the protraction of the dispute. The ruling dynasty of Akyem Abuakwa took steps to centralise the

kingdom in order to re-establish social control over the chiefs and commoners. Even if the kings did not *strictu sensu* own or directly control much land, the evidence suggests that the *Okyenhene* personally leased and benefitted from mineral concessions throughout his kingdom.

Up until 1915, neither the Asamankese nor Akwatia stools objected to these bylaws and other arrangements concerning the alienation of land. Indeed, Kwaku Amoah wrote to acknowledge receipt of the Okyeman Council Bylaws in a letter dated 3 July, 1913. It stated:

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of all the letters concerning or prohibiting the sale of lands. I have also by your instruction forwarded same to the chiefs under me so far from here to Akenten and thence to Akwatia and Kade.¹²

Not only did he acknowledge the bylaws; he agreed to comply with them. In September 1915, responded to Nana Ofori Atta, explaining that:

I respectfully beg to inform you that in accordance with your instruction and orders with respect to the proper arrangement, agreement or conditions to be entered into with the new settlers now farming on the forest land attached to my stool I sent some of my elders and two clerks to view and lay the respective boundaries of each of the farmers' plantation.¹³

In July 1916, Kwaku Amoah had indeed sent a sum of £86.15 to the *Okyenhene* to cover expenses from certain lands sold by one of his subjects four years earlier. Sounding very apologetic for the late remitting of the *Omanhene's* share of one-fourth, he wrote:

Nana, it was never my intention to make order, so far as the laws and customs of this realm are concerned for selling land without your notice; nor can I forfeit any such amount of yours through an illegal practice that had not been enforced, practiced by any of my predecessors.¹⁴

Nana Ofori Atta's land reforms threatened the interests of some sub-chiefs, especially those of Tafo and Asamankese, whose towns were of Akwamu origin. Not surprisingly, they refuted the claim implied by Nana Ofori Atta's announcement of 1915 that the Paramount Stool shared ownership and control over stool lands with the sub-chiefs. In a case involving Tafo and the Paramount Stool, arising from *Tafohene* Kwadwo Peasah's sale of certain portions of Tafo stool lands without the consent of the Paramount Stool, the *Tafohene* claimed that the land rightly belonged to him and together with his Elders, issued a public notice “repudiating the validity of all leases in connection with Tafo lands on which the *Omanhene's* name appeared”.¹⁵ An inquiry was held at Kyebi and the Okyeman Council confirmed in a unanimous ruling that the Paramount Stool “is the owner of all Akim Stool Lands” (Addo-Fening, 1987: 99). Accordingly, it laid down the following directives: (1) that the *Okyenhene's* prior knowledge and consent were necessary for a valid alienation of stool land; and (2) every document in respect of land alienation, to be valid, must bear the *Okyenhene's* signature (Addo-Fening, 1987).¹⁶ The judgement affirming the Paramount Stool's primordial ownership and control over all Abuakwa lands was pronounced in the presence of the Acting District Commissioner, W.J.A. Jones in 1921. It reads in part:

¹² Arbitration Award Exhibit “H”, 23 September 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 13.

¹³ Arbitration Award Exhibit “J”, 23 September 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 25.

¹⁴ Arbitration Award, 23 September 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 32.

¹⁵ D.C. Birrim's September Quarterly Report, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/636, 219.

¹⁶ The chiefs, unanimous in their judgement against the Tafo chief, ordered him to pay £96 to the Paramount Chief.

¹⁰ Note of Interview at SNA's Office 1922, PRAAD Accra, ADM 1/1/1105; see also, History of Asamankese Dispute, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1627.

¹¹ Letter from Ofori Atta to *Tafohene*, 7 April 1917, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1453, 32.

Any land in Akim Abuakwa before its alienation should be known by Omanhene and his consent obtained before its alienation can proceed. Omanhene's name must appear in every document with regard to land in Akim Abuakwa. We find that if the Ohene of Tafo said that he owns the land absolutely, it is a lie. Since the ancient times, if a chief received legs of game, he had to send some to the Omanhene, also shares of snails collected were sent to him. We therefore find that the Ohene's claim to be the owner of the Tafo lands is absolutely wrong and not according to Akim Abuakwa law: we know that the Omanhene of Akim Abuakwa is the owner of all Akim Stool lands.¹⁷

Among the signatories was Kwabena Poakwa, the linguist for the Asamankese Stool (Brew, 1981).

With this ruling, Nana Ofori Atta and the State Council proceeded to enforce the traditional land tenure system. In accordance with the customary land tenure system of Akyem Abuakwa, the *Okyenhene* was entitled to a portion of snail harvest known as "awafee" (Addo-Fening, 1987). In addition, he was deemed entitled to part of "Bosre" (leg of game), one-third share of *Ahudee* (treasure-trove) and one-third share of *epo*, a nugget of gold valued upwards of £2. In the case of the *epo* and *ahudee*, the remaining two-thirds share was divided equally between the occupant of the stool directly owning the land on which the gold was discovered and the discoverer (Eisenschmidt's Report, 14 July 1868). Notwithstanding the State Council's judgement, Kwaku Amoah remained unmoved. In that same year, he sold a piece of land at Asamankese to a European representative of the Anglo-Guinea firm called "Mr. Semple" for the construction of a warehouse. He refused to sign his portion of a lease agreement prepared by the *Okyenhene* in the name of "Omanhene, Elders, Councillors and Oman of Akim Abuakwa", arguing that, "the Omanhene had no land at Asamankese".¹⁸

Kwaku Amoah not only disobeyed summons from the *Okyenhene* to go to Kyebi and explain his conduct. But from 1921 onwards, he and Odikro Kwame Kuma also absented themselves from meetings of the State Council, a body to which Asamankese and Akwatia had for almost 300 years belonged. In a letter to Nana Ofori Atta I dated at Adeiso in 1921, he communicated his decision to secede from the jurisdiction of the Paramount Chief:

Nana, I do not want to tax your patience, and just to relieve you and Okyeman of any inconveniency that my absence from your meting may cause, I and my elders respectfully lay before you that we should not be counted upon as we shall henceforth be no parties to any bye-laws or Rules that would be passed by you and your elders and that such bye-laws and Rules as you may have passed should not be communicated to us.¹⁹

On 7 October 1921, Kwaku Amoah petitioned the Acting Governor for the Asamankese and Akwatia Stools to withdraw their allegiance to the Paramount Stool of Akyem Abuakwa.²⁰ Notwithstanding the Governor's rejection of his request, Kwaku Amoah and the *Akwatiahene* continued to defy the authority of the *Okyenhene* by alienating lands without reference to him and withholding his entitled third share and royalties (Addo-Fening,

1975). The two rebels ignored the *Okyenhene* in all ensuing land transactions and he was not made a party to the final negotiated agreement between Odikro Kwame Kuma of Akwatia and the representatives of CAST on 26 September 1922.²¹ The *Okyenhene*'s "lost" revenue for the period 1925 and 1935 was estimated at £3000. This represented a one-third share of the £10,000 payable annually by the mining company over this period to the land owners.²²

4.2. The involvement of NCBWA lawyers in the crisis

The lawyers for Kwaku Amoah included Kobina Sekyi and Kojo Thompson, members of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) and subsequently, the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA). Because of their educational achievements and economic standing, they believed they were entitled to the national political leadership. The remaining lawyers were Thomas Hutton-Mills, the first President of the National Congress of British West Africa, and R. Quartey-Papafio, joint Treasurer of the Congress. Nana Ofori Atta I took the position that the traditional rulers of the various ethnic states in the Gold Coast were the most authoritative exponents of native public opinion and for that matter, the governance of the Gold Coast should be vested in them as opposed to the educated elite. This earned him the displeasure of the elites who looked for any opportunity to undermine his position in Gold Coast politics. The Asamankese dispute provided them with ammunition to challenge him (Addo-Fening, 1997).

A domestic dispute that arose over diamond concessions and which should have remained a matter of local interest acquired a national dimension, and was exploited by the intelligentsia to harass and embarrass Nana Ofori Atta as well as provided them with the rationale to challenge the *Okyenhene*.²³ Throughout the protracted legal battle, Kwaku Amoah continuously contested the paramount chief's authority and undermined all efforts to enforce a new property rights system. The litigation became protracted due to the vested economic interest the congress' lawyers had in the case. For instance, the dispute was actively supported and encouraged by Hutton Mills, a lawyer who had personal economic interests in Asamankese lands. He was permitted to participate despite his involvement in the Press Advertisement of 1915 and 1918, which "Prohibited alienation of Abuakwa lands in any form without the *Okyenhene*'s consent and nullified certain concession agreements on grounds of default" (Addo-Fening, 1997). Hutton Mills supported the rebel chiefs because he thought that his unlawful acquisitions would be better secured under Kwaku Amoah than the *Okyenhene*, who had on several occasions warned him about the illegality of such possessions (Addo-Fening, 1997).

The Congress lawyers also backed the Asamankese rebels and intentionally prolonged the conflict because of the monies that accrued to them in the form of professional fees. Asamankese and Akwatia had no problems in securing the services of legal counsel due to the unlimited funds accrued from the diamond concessions. Congress lawyers such as Kobina Sekyi, Hutton Mills and Kojo Thompson reaped considerable amounts of money from the

²¹ History of Asamankese Disputes, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1627, 83.

²² The authority of the *Okyenhene* was persistently disregarded to the extent that, the two chiefs raised their status by acquiring stool paraphernalia which, under native custom, they were not entitled to (ADM 11/1/1105).

²³ Because of their educational attainments and economic standing, the elite thought they were entitled to the political leadership of the Gold Coast, hence, they saw themselves as a "duly constituted and sole authorised representative of the kings, rulers and chiefs of the Gold Coast". Moreover, the preference for traditional institutions by the Colonial Government over popular democracy as advocated by the elite was another factor that fomented and fostered the antagonism between the *Okyenhene* and lawyer Hutton Mills and his colleagues of the Gold Coast nationalist movement. (Metcalfe, 1964).

¹⁷ Answer by Hon. Ofori Atta to Petition, 4 November 1921, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1105, 95; also see, D.C. Birrim's September Quarterly Report, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/636, 119.

¹⁸ Notes of Interview held at the S.N.A.'s Office, 30 March 1922, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 13. Nana Ofori Atta signed his signature as principal conveyer in his capacity as the Paramount Chief of Akyem Abuakwa. The land was leased out for a consideration sum of £25 and an annual rent of £120 for ninety-nine years. See, Arbitration Award Exhibit "V", 23 September 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 49.

¹⁹ Kwaku Amoah to Ofori Atta, 27 June 1921, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 39.

²⁰ History of Asamankese Disputes, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1627, 78.

litigation.²⁴ When the rebel leaders were not regularly paying Kobina Sekyi, he wrote to them in 1931 emphasising the need for his fees to be paid. His letter reads:

I have come to the conclusion that, because I have not been hard enough with you in the matter of the money due to me for the work I have done; you have become slack in reserving money for the great struggle in which I have spent so much of my strength. I wish now to lay down the conditions upon which I am prepared to work in connection with this struggle. That 10 per cent of every amount received as a result of my work would be paid to me and that 10 per cent of all the bulk should also be calculated (Dumehasie, 1997)²⁵

The involvement of lawyers in the Asamankese dispute escalated the cost of the crisis. Nana Ofori Atta I recognised this, claiming that “Asamankese is firmly within the grip of people who regard the unfortunate situation as a pool of wealth”.²⁶ The list included Kobina Sekyi and Kojo Thompson, who demanded £2886 in legal fees (invoices submitted to the Asamankese Stool Treasury in 1940). Sekyi further submitted a personal claim of £497, described as “service charges”, between 1932 and 1937. In addition, Thompson and Sekyi were paid £1866 in “professional fees” between 1932 and 1937, and the latter received another £497 during the same period.²⁷ Overall, the large sums of money that came to Asamankese and Akwatia aristocrats by way of stool revenues were drained away in lawyers’ fees as a result of the protracted litigation between the *Okyenhene* and the Asamankese rebels. For instance, the total payments made by CAST to the Asamankese and Akwatia stools from 1923 to 1934 were approximated at £60,000, all of which was virtually committed to the litigation.²⁸ These monies could have been used to finance the development of social infrastructure in the state.

Again, the Asamankese and Akwatia stools received an estimated £75,000 per quarter in rents between 1923 and 1930. Royalties calculated at 5% of the company’s profits averaged nearly £10,000 per annum.²⁹ In 1928, the rebels received £12,000 in royalties.³⁰ Between November 1929 and 30 June 1931, a sum of £57,560.92 was paid to the secessionist chiefs and by virtue of these revenues, they were able to hire the best Gold Coast lawyers to champion their secessionist agenda.³¹ In the section of his report of 1940 dealing with this ruinous litigation, C.R. Havers concluded that:

There is good ground for the belief that, Sir Ofori Atta and his Stool spent over £100,000 on this litigation and it is probable that the expenses of the other side were not far from short of this sum (C.R. Havers Report, 1940)

Moreover, the conflict also perpetrated violence in Akyem Abuakwa, particularly in Asamankese. On 3 September 1930, Nana Ofori Atta I sent *Benkumhene* Nana Twum Antwi a consummate diplomat endowed with much tact and wisdom to Asamankese to effect a peaceful reconciliation. Upon arrival at Asamankese, he was subjected to immense ridicule and no quarter was prepared for him so he had to return to Kyebi. In early-October 1930, he

returned to Asamankese with about 100 followers to take up residence. Because it was rumoured that the Asamankese people were planning to ambush the main road with armed men to oppose the *Benkumhene*,³² the government provided him with an escort of about 150 soldiers (Addo-Fening, 1997).

The *Benkumhene*’s visit was viewed with great suspicion and it was a great source of provocation to the people of Asamankese and Akwatia, especially from March 1931. On 5 May, a tragic incident occurred. At about 5.30 PM, Phillip Kwaku Afoakwa, son of the chief of the *Anum quarter* of Asamankese was assassinated by Nyedua Kwabena, a member of the *Kyirem Asafo*. Nyedua Kwabena acted under the greatest provocation from the Asamankese secessionists. A week before the incident, his house had been stoned and damaged and he himself was brutally assaulted. The District Commissioner had found it necessary to arrange for police protection for him (Addo-Fening, 1997).³³

The news of Afoakwa’s death spread rapidly and almost immediately, the *Apesemaka*³⁴ Asafo group at Asamankese mobilised their people for action. Three hours after the murder of Afoakwa, two *Kotokoli* men from British Togoland, Yerima *Kotokoli* and Mahama *Kotokoli* – both supporters of Kwaku Amoah – were also shot dead by Kwame Daako, a servant of Odikro Kwasi Otu-Daako of Osino who had accompanied the *Benkumhene* to Asamankese. The murder of Afoakwa provoked hostile demonstrations against members of the *Kyirem Asafo*, during which the house of one of them was bombarded by stones. When the angry demonstrators threatened the house occupied by the *Benkumhene*, Kwasi Otu-Daako, fearing for his safety and security and that of the *Benkumhene*, ordered his servant, Kwame Daako, to fire shots into the angry mob that had besieged their residence. This resulted in the deaths of the two Togolese. According to oral histories compiled by Brew (1981), however, the Osino chief shot the two men himself.

On that very night, Foster Okai, an active supporter of the *Okyenhene* in Asamankese, sustained serious injuries when he was shot at. Three women and four children also sustained serious injuries. Nyedua was tried and convicted of manslaughter and jailed for two years.³⁵ Odikro Kwasi Otu-Daako and his servant, Kwame Daako, were convicted of murder and sentenced to death. They appealed the decision in August 1931, submitting their claims to the West African Court of Appeal, which led to the penalty being reduced to manslaughter. In the end, they were sentenced to four and three years’ imprisonment with hard labour, respectively (Addo-Fening, 1997).³⁶

The dispute between Asamankese and the Paramount Stool of Akyem Abuakwa also gave rise to an explosive situation at Asamankese, dividing the town’s people into “*Apesemaka*” and

³² The *Benkumhene* (Royal Asona Clan) is the chief of the left division and the commander of the left wing army. He is otherwise known as *Fanteakwahene*. His permanent residence is Begoro. The principal chiefs under his division are the *Oduahene* (Aduana Clan) of Osenase and Otwereso; the *Apinamanehene* (Royal Asona Clan); the *Osinohene* and *Apedwahene* (Agona Clan). The *Benkumhene*’s coronet is similar to the *Nifahene*’s; both being equal in rank. At parades the *Benkumhene* is third in line after the *Adontenhene*. See, <http://pallionghana.com/projects/etwienana/cms/okyeman/okeman-council> [accessed 02.04.15].

³³ *Minute Number 58, 7 July 1931*, PRAAD Accra, ADM 18/11/1630, 35; Addo-Fening, *Akyem Abuakwa*, 143.

³⁴ The *Asafo* are traditional warrior groups in Akan culture. The word derives from *sa*, meaning war, and *fo*, meaning people. The traditional role of the *asafo* companies was defence of the state. Due to the Asamankese crisis, a rift developed in the *Asafo* which culminated in the springing up of two divisions namely the *Apesemaka* who were against the *Okyenhene* and the *Kyirem* who supported the paramount ruler. See, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asafo> [accessed on 02.04.15].

³⁵ *Quarterly Report, June 1931*, PRAAD Accra, ADM 32/1/15, 13.

³⁶ *District Commissioner’s Diary for the Month of August 1931*, PRAAD Koforidua, COS 21/22/109, 207; also see, *History of the Asamankese Dispute*, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1627, 29; see also, *Minute Number 58, July 1931*, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1630, 32.

²⁴ *Asamankese Law Suits*, 19 August 1922, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1630, 132.

²⁵ Also see, *Kobina Sekyi to Kwaku Amoah*, 1 April 1931, PRAAD Accra, ADM 571/64, 75; see also Dumehasie, “Asamankese Crisis,” 125.

²⁶ *Ofori Atta to Sir Ransford Slater, 18 September 1929*, AASA 4/57, 22.

²⁷ *Asamankese and Akwatia Stool Debts, 1932–1937*, PRAAD Accra, ADM 32/1/29, 90.

²⁸ *Asamankese Disputes*, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1627, 28; see also, *Commissioner for the Eastern Province to the S.N.A.*, 6 March 1937, PRAAD Accra, ADM 32/1/176, 40.

²⁹ *Diary of D.C., July 1930*, PRAAD, Koforidua, ADM 26/6/49, 16.

³⁰ *Ofori Atta to D.C. Kibbi*, 2 April 1930, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 80.

³¹ *S.N.A.’s Arbitration Award*, 29 September 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 87.

“Kyirem” groups. Relations between members of the Kyirem Company and the rest of the Oman deteriorated to the point where, in 1929, a number of employees went into voluntary exile in Kyebi. They abandoned their farms and properties, which were seized by the Asamankese Stool (Dumehasie, 1997). The Quarterly Report of 1930 explains the situation in detail:

It appears that the Asamankesehene has seized the farms belonging to the supporters of Kibbi, who returned to their Paramount Chief's town during the hostilities of last year. . . owing to the death of one or two of the Kibbi supporters, citizens of Asamankese have inherited the farms so seized and at present the Ohene still claims the farms are his.³⁷

On several occasions, members of the Kyirem Asafo sought refuge in Kyebi for several years. Those remaining in Asamankese could hardly go about their daily activities without police protection.³⁸ They could not walk the streets of Asamankese and Akwatia.³⁹ Women were also brutalised and were not allowed to draw water from the streams and wells in Asamankese.⁴⁰

When it was rumoured that the members of the Kyirem Asafo were returning to Asamankese, the rebels sealed off all accessible roads to the town with armed men parading the streets with offensive weapons such as machetes, sticks and stones. These were used to attack motor vehicles conveying the integrationists and their expected places of abode.⁴¹ These confrontations created a turbulent situation where peace, tranquillity and concord were sacrificed. Initially, the government and the *Okyenhene* made every effort to get the secessionist chiefs to appear before the Okyeman Council for the resolution of the dispute.

4.3. The role of the Akwamu and Ga states in the conflict

The secessionist chiefs filed various legal suits at the Divisional Courts, the Supreme Court, the West African Court of Appeal and then the Privy Council – the highest Court in the British Empire in pursuit of their claims. Thus, what originally began as an internal dispute between a sub-chief and his paramount chief soon assumed national and international proportions. For instance, the Akwamu Traditional Authority entered into the dispute because of its vested economic interest in Abuakwaland. They became interested in diamonds that had been discovered in Abuakwaland and they expressed their desire to return to their ancestral lands (i.e. Abuakwa) so that they would benefit from the diamonds as well. The Akwamu were therefore ready to capitalise on any misunderstanding between the *Okyenhene* and the people of Akwamu origin living in Abuakwaland to create confusion with the intention of returning to their former land. This was the position adopted by the *Akwamuhene* throughout the Asamankese crisis. The nostalgic claim of the Asamankese stool lands by the *Akwamuhene* dated as far back as 1884 and again in 1914 when the Akwamu expressed their desire to return to their former land.⁴²

The *Akwamuhene* granted the Asamankese rebels protection in Akwamufie whenever Nana Ofori Atta threatened to have them arrested. He also championed the cause of inciting Kwaku Amoah and the people of Asamankese to refuse reconciliation with the *Okyenhene*.⁴³ Not only did he instigate the Elders of Asamankese to defy the authority of the *Okyenhene*, he also encouraged the people to look to him as their “Paramount Chief.”⁴⁴ It was no wonder that

when he appeared as a witness at the Justice Hall Arbitration Committee, he blatantly distorted oral tradition and misrepresented facts when the issue of Akwamu defeat by Abuakwa came up for discussion.⁴⁵

The *Akwamuhene*'s clandestine activity in the Asamankese crisis was well known to Nana Ofori Atta. In a letter to the District Commissioner in 1929, Nana Ofori Atta I wrote that:

The Omanhene of Akwamu has in no way relaxed his activities in regard to the Asamankese affair. He has done everything he can to make things extremely unpleasant and uncomfortable to me. In complaining to me in writing as to the arrest of a Stool son of his, he ended by words conveying his usual threatening attitude. I am fully convinced that but for the Omanhene of Akwamu, Asamankese would have now realised their folly.⁴⁶

The colonial government was also not oblivious of the *Akwamuhene*'s involvement in the Asamankese crisis. Governor Slater in 1929 described the *Akwamuhene*'s behaviour as “meddlesome officiousness” and warned him in the following words:

The fact that the Omanhene of Akim Abuakwa is arresting some of the people of Asamankese, one of the Divisions of the State of Abuakwa, is no concern of yours. Further, his Excellency is given to understand that you are deliberately giving assistance to the people of Asamankese in evading the execution of lawful process issued by the Paramount Chief of the state to which they belong and wishes you to be warned of the grave responsibility you are thereby assuming (Dumehasie, 1997).⁴⁷

On 29 May 1928, the *Akwamuhene* filed a lawsuit in Victoriaborg as a plaintiff and claimed that Asamankese stool lands and the people thereon were the *bona fide* property of the Akwamu Stool.

The Ga *Mantse* (Chief of Accra) and the Chief of Osu and Chief of James Town were equally involved in the Asamankese crisis as they defended the economic interests of their subjects in Abuakwaland. Moreover, from 1883, when the Akuapem and Krobo, as well as some of the coastal states, came under the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance (NJO), their chiefs took advantage of Akwamu's exclusion from the ambit of the Ordinance to exercise territorial jurisdiction over the Densuagya and Krobo plantations as though they formed integral parts of their states. Upon his ascension as *Okyenhene*, Nana Ofori Atta I objected to the treatment of the Densuagya purchased lands and the Krobo plantations as extensions of their states. He would therefore incur the wrath of the chiefs of Accra as well as the Rulers of Akuapem and Krobo. These leaders capitalised on the Asamankese dispute to frustrate further the *Okyenhene* (Addo-Fening, 1987).

The Chief of Osu, for instance, colluded with the *Akwamuhene* to frustrate the *Okyenhene*'s efforts to arrest the rebel leaders in Osu. When the *Okyenhene*'s arrest-party arrived at Osu to apprehend the Asamankese rebels in their hideout, they were intercepted and brutally beaten with all types of weaponry such as “fufu and hockey sticks as well as pieces of cement bricks” by Osu and Akwamu subjects. Consequently, two Kyebi Palace police sustained various degrees of injuries.⁴⁸

Another ethnic-related fracas occurred between the Ga community at Nsawam and the *Okyenhene*'s arrest-party stationed at Adoagyiri to apprehend rebels on whom a warrant had been served. On 31 March 1929, 12 people made up of Akwamu and Ga subjects were arrested by the police and charged with breaching

³⁷ Quarterly Report, 30 June 1932, PRAAD Accra, ADM 32/1/15, 73.

³⁸ Quarterly Report, 31 March 1937, PRAAD Accra, ADM 32/1/15, 74.

³⁹ Quarterly Report, ADM 32/1/15, 77.

⁴⁰ Quarterly Report, ADM 32/1/15, 83.

⁴¹ Quarterly Report, PRAAD Accra, ADM 32/1/15, 76.

⁴² Arbitration Award, 23 September 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 39.

⁴³ Asamankese Dispute, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 6.

⁴⁴ Asamankese Affairs 1928, AASA 14/491, 2.

⁴⁵ Arbitration Award, 23 September 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 108.

⁴⁶ Ofori Atta to D.C. for Kibbi, 3 June 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 18.

⁴⁷ Also see, Hugh Thomas to Nana Asare Ababio IV, 31 May 1929, S.N.A. Papers, 19.

⁴⁸ Medical Officer of Korle Bu's Report, 26 May 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 26.

the peace. Sam Asumaning of Kyebi was charged for mutilating the body of Mensah Komeyetei, a native of Accra.⁴⁹ The Ga *Mantse* adamantly refused to release the Asamankese fugitives at Osu to the *Okyenhene* despite the warrant issued to arrest them. *Okyenhene* Ofori Atta I became unpopular in the coastal states of the Gold Coast Colony because most of the lawyers and congressmen hailed from the coast. They spread condemning propaganda about the *Okyenhene* in news media largely based in coastal towns. This coastal antipathy against Nana Ofori Atta reached its peak in April 1921, when the *Okyenhene* was jeered at in Accra.⁵⁰

Chiefs misused monies that came into their hands. This prompted Thomas Yaw Kani of Kyebi to invite the colonial government on 31 March 1927, to institute controls over public income and expenditure with a view to ensuring that stool land revenue was spent in the best interest of the people of Akyem Abuakwa.⁵¹ He deplored the unbecoming and injudicious manner in which some chiefs applied stool revenue. Substantial sums of money, according to Yaw Kani, were simply squandered by chiefs.⁵²

The assurance of mining revenue was also responsible for the protraction of the Asamankese dispute. Mining revenue enabled the secessionist chiefs to pursue countless legal suits. It was against this background that the government, in March 1928, took a firm decision to create state treasuries.

5. The impact of the crisis

With a view to checking the spate of reckless, selfish and irresponsible disbursement of colossal sums of money from the concession rents and creating a problem of cash liquidity for the rebels, the colonial government issued a proclamation, which brought into being the Asamankese Division Stool Treasury Ordinance (ADRO) on March 30, 1935.⁵³ It provided for the collection and disbursement of stool revenue “directly under the control of government” through the establishment of Stool Treasuries at Asamankese and Akwatia. Regulations made on 2 May under the ADRO provided for government control of all rents, dues, royalties and revenues from stool lands, as well as “all levies, dues, fees and rates payable by virtue of, or in accordance with, the provisions of any ordinance or bye-laws were to be paid into the two stool treasuries”. The Ordinance empowered the Governor-in-Council to prescribe “the purpose” to which such revenues allocated to any such purpose. All individuals aside from the “prescribed officer”, namely the District Commissioner who received stool revenue, were penalised £50 or two years imprisonment with or without hard labour if they violated the Ordinance.⁵⁴

The ADRO helped to end the rebellion by denying the rebel chiefs access to the enormous funds which had enabled them sustain their rebellion and law suits against the *Okyenhene*. In an address at the reconciliation meeting held on 27 May 1938, Hon. A.C. Duncan-Johnstone, Commissioner of the Eastern Province, stated that, the ADRO was to check “unwarrantable squandering of stool revenue on matters of no constructive value”.⁵⁵ While Nana Ofori Atta had no difficulty in drawing his one-third share from the

treasuries, the rebel chiefs required the approval of the District Commissioner before they could take out any money. Thus, the implementation of ADRO divided the Asamankese front. A lack of funds to continue the struggle compelled the rebels to become receptive to proposals for reconciliation and reintegration into the Abuakwa kingdom. In other words, the ADRO quickly dried up the rebels sources of funds and compelled them to negotiate for peace. It was the discovery of diamonds (i.e. money) that ignited the conflict and it was the lack of money through the imposition of the ADRO that brought the crisis to a halt.

The State Treasury System impacted positively on Asamankese and Akwatia in particular and Akyem Abuakwa in general by bringing order, sanity and accountability into processes emphasising the collection and expenditure of revenue accruing to the stool. It also encouraged accountability which helped to restore lost dignity to the office of the chief, and allowed for the long-term planning of development in Akyem Abuakwa. This was evident in the case of Asamankese and Akwatia, which by reason of their peculiar circumstances, were started on the treasury system earlier.⁵⁶

Instances of planned and responsible development which made the state treasury system worthwhile and beneficial were widespread. Notably, in the 1937–1938 fiscal year, Duncan-Johnstone in the said address indicated that a total of £3572.10.10 came to the Asamankese Stool by way of revenue from various sources.⁵⁷ With this sum, the town financed the construction of market sheds; streets were also constructed with a drainage system. Moreover, it was now possible for the town to maintain a sizeable team of conservancy labourers. Asamankese also had a lorry park, and a comprehensive plan for town drainage was conceived.⁵⁸ Again, in the 1939–1940 financial year, the minutes of the 31st Session of the Provincial Council held at Dodowa on 5 March 1940, revealed that the Native Administration of Asamankese had undertaken a number of beneficial public works and still managed to have an surplus bank balance of £400.⁵⁹

Honourable Duncan-Johnstone’s address referred to above revealed that, in the 1937/1938 fiscal year, Akwatia had constructed a three classroom Native Administration School with a sizeable playing ground, office and school equipment. The school also had a high-quality teaching staff. Here, drains and market sheds were also constructed,⁶⁰ and in the 1939/1940 financial year, a model village was raised at the cost of £1000.⁶¹

According to the Minutes of the 31st Session of the Provincial Council, the rate of development in these two towns engendered a strong desire for a similar experience among the people of Adeiso. They, indeed, requested for this, and were put under ADRO on 4 February 1939. After barely a year, Adeiso in March 1940 had recorded a working balance of £288 after budgeting for education and the resurfacing of a lorry park.⁶²

Revenue collection also showed remarkable improvement. For example, the total revenue paid to the Akwatia stool by CAST in June 1935 was £2895 and had increased to approximately £4000 by June 1936. Mining royalties for Akwatia in 1937 were estimated at £3500, of which the share for Asamankese, which represented a quarter of the total royalties paid to the stool of Akwatia by CAST,

⁴⁹ Police Officer to the Ag. Deputy I.G.P., 31 May 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 27.

⁵⁰ Ofori Atta to D.C. of Kibbi, 3 June 1929, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 63.

⁵¹ Thomas Yao (sic) Kani to S.N.A., 31 March 1927, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/928, 72.

⁵² Kani to S.N.A., ADM 11/1/928, 73.

⁵³ The Asamankese Division Regulation Ordinance, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 34; also see, *Diary of D.C. Birrim, April 1935*, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 26/6/49, 95.

⁵⁴ *Diary of Birrim D.C., April 1935*, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 85.

⁵⁵ Address by Hon. A.C. Duncan-Johnstone, 27 May 1938, PRAAD Accra, ADM 29/6/63, 53.

⁵⁶ The Asamankese Ordinance, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 11; See also, *Diary of D.C. Birrim, April 1935*, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 26/6/49, 43.

⁵⁷ Division Regulation, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 65; also see, D.C. Birrim, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 26/6/49, 14.

⁵⁸ Division Regulation, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 26/6/49, 90.

⁵⁹ Minutes of the 31st Session of the Provincial Council, 5 March 1940, PRAAD ADM 11/1799, 25.

⁶⁰ Address by Hon. A.C. Duncan-Johnstone, 27 May 1938, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 29/6/63, 93.

⁶¹ Minutes of Provincial Council, ADM 11/1799, 34.

⁶² C.E.P.’s Address to Eastern Provincial Council, 28 February 1939, PRAAD Koforidua, ADM 29/6/68, 38.

was £875. Similarly, the annual estimate of rents from the Asamankese stool lands amounted to £6000. Tolls from conservancy, slaughter houses and market sheds were pegged at £200, £180 and £500, respectively.⁶³

The array of projects undertaken under the State Treasury System, namely, market sheds, streets, a network of drainage systems, schools, playing grounds, school equipment, conservancy services, lorry parks and utility services shows conscientious planning motivated by the need to maintain the welfare of the people of Akyem Abuakwa. This marked a clean break from the past, when huge sums of money meant for the state were left in the hands of chiefs and the traditional ruling elite. Thus, on the basis of these instances of planned and conscientious development, given the little money available, it could be said that the state of affairs in Akyem Abuakwa prior to the statutory establishment of the state treasury system was most regrettable.

It is clear from the above account that, the State Treasury System was as timely as it was reasonable; and, was unquestionably one of the very few ordinances which sought the general good of the Akyem Abuakwa people. According to *Addo-Fening (1997)*:

The bulk of the income of £18,094 generated in 1942 was paid out as salaries to chiefs and state functionaries. The salaries ranged from £3,000 per annum for the Okyenhene to £100–£200 for clerical staff and £50–£100 for stool heads and functionaries. The 1939–40 estimates for Asamankese made provision for £2,000 as salaries for chiefs, elders and functionaries with the chief earning £780 per annum.

The Stool Treasuries laid a firm foundation for an equitable and rational disbursement of public funds for social improvement. It also enabled the Abuakwa state to raise sufficient revenue for significant social improvements from the 1940s onwards. The Commissioner of the Eastern Province acknowledged this in his writings:

I visited Asamankese and Akwatia on the 25 and 26 July and was much impressed by the work which was being undertaken there. In both places there were now large main drains into which all other parts of the towns can be drained. New roads are being constructed in accordance with the layout. Market sheds and lorry park layouts. Chiefs of both towns are most helpful and have given the District Commissioner “carte blanche” to knock down any house which happens to be in line of the layout.⁶⁴

The State Treasury System caught on very well in Akyem Abuakwa, especially after *Okyenhene Ofori Atta I*'s visit to the Northern Territories to observe the impact of the Native Treasuries established by W.J.A. Jones. In a short time (i.e. from March to September 1942), the State Treasury, which was operating in full force in Akyem Abuakwa, had recorded a total of £18,094 from concession rents, royalties and court fees. Of this amount, £712 was spent on education staff, £248 on sanitation and latrines and £700 on a new classroom block at Kyebi (*Simensen, 1975*).

But the Asamankese secession attempt also had negative effects on the people of Asamankese and Akwatia. As a corollary to this matter of litigation, colossal sums of money which could have been utilised for the development of the state were expended on gifts in order to win favour from influential people. In a letter to the Honourable Secretary of Native Affairs, dated 17 February 1928, the Commissioner of the Eastern Province reported the presentation of a “Morris Cowley” car to the *Akwamuhene* in January 1928 by the litigant chiefs, *Ohene Kwaku Amoah* and *Odikro Kwame Kuma*.⁶⁵

The effect of the litigation was that the people of Asamankese and Akwatia benefitted very little from the revenue received. Governor Slater, after a visit to Akwatia in 1929, reported that “It is one of the most squalid towns in the Gold Coast, there being no sign that one penny of the rents and royalties has been spent on its improvements” (*Greenhalgh, 1974*).⁶⁶ In 1933, the Governor wrote to say that Akwatia and Asamankese:

... are squalid and lacking in improvements and amenities which are to be found in many places of their size enjoying but a fraction of their revenues. Most of the land which is not actually required by the inhabitants themselves has been disposed of, and today the people are left, not only with nothing to show for this huge expenditure [on litigation] of Stool funds but with a debt of several thousand pounds. . . The division has been brought to the verge of ruin (*Greenhalgh, 1974*)

Thus, the mining and exploitation of diamonds intensified litigation amongst Abuakwa chiefs and resulted in an attempted secession of the Asamankese and Akwatia stools from the Abuakwa kingdom. The litigation which was purely a local matter acquired a national dimension with the involvement of Congress lawyers bent on harassing and discrediting *Nana Ofori Atta I* because of the former's resentment of his role and stature in the politics of the Gold Coast.

6. Conclusion

The discovery of diamonds in Akwatia sparked off the Asamankese crisis. This conflict was further fuelled by the involvement of the states of Akwamu, Ga and Krobo as well as the NCBWA lawyers, all of whom had vested economic interests. The crisis erupted when upon *Ofori Atta I*'s ascension to the throne as *Okyenhene*, he objected to the treatment of the *Densuagya* purchased lands and the Krobo plantations labelling them as extensions of their states in his jurisdiction and therefore put measures in place to reverse the trend. This did not sit well with the interested parties who capitalised on the Asamankese Crisis to frustrate the *Okyenhene*. Several key conclusions emerge from this study. The first is that the introduction of scientific mining in the state in 1897 complicated the land alienation problem. The second is that the promise of limitless wealth from land alienation spawned a culture of greed, perversion, self-seeking and political irresponsibility on the part of *Kwaku Amoah* of Asamankese. Thirdly, the sudden increase in Abuakwa land value and wealth resulted in litigation. The discovery of diamonds intensified litigation between Chief *Kwaku Amoah* of Asamankese and the *Okyenhene*, resulting in an attempted secession of the Asamankese and Akwatia stools from the Abuakwa Kingdom. The litigation which was purely a local matter acquired a national dimension with the involvement of Congress lawyers bent on discrediting *Nana Ofori Atta I* because of the former's resentment of his role and stature in the politics of the Gold Coast. Fourthly, the spate of reckless, selfish and irresponsible disbursement of colossal sums of money from the concession rents and other sources became a catalyst for institutionalisation of the Stool Treasury System in Akyem Abuakwa.

In summary, although the north of the country receives the most coverage on the issue of conflict, it is important to clarify that the quest for resource control in the mineral-rich Abuakwa kingdom of Ghana's south sparked conflicts and instability of equivalent magnitude in the country during the colonial era.

⁶³ Memo on Asamankese Stool Treasury, PRAAD Accra, COS 21/22/116, 47.

⁶⁴ Memo on Asamankese Stool Treasury, PRAAD Accra, COS 21/22/116, 140.

⁶⁵ C.E.P. Newlands to S.N.A., 19 February 1928, PRAAD Accra, ADM 11/1/1105, 31.

⁶⁶ See also, *Governor Slater to Secretary of State*, 23 October 1929, PRAAD Accra, CSO 96/691; also, *Greenhalgh, Economic History*, 224.

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