
A Re-examination of Colonial Perceptions About the Asante of Ghana

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Abstract: Prejudices bothering on ethnicity is one of the colonial legacies in Africa. The European colonisers have been held responsible for separating groups which were once together, and also, for raising or developing one group above others, and for these actions, have been blamed for some of the ethnic conflicts the continent is grappling with in modern times. Other groups had also been perceived in certain negative terms, and these still linger on, and have become labels on them, the Asante ethnic group in Ghana being a typical example. It can be observed from the political, religious, economic and socio-cultural spheres in the colonial era, that the Asante people were largely depicted more in negative terms vs-a-vis the other ethnic groups in the country. Terms such as warlike, quarrelsome, aggressive, and bloodthirsty, just to mention a few were used to describe them. Were these accurate descriptions of the Asante people, or mere exaggerations? What were some of the underlying reasons for this stand by the Europeans regarding the Asante? These colonial perceptions need to be critically re-examined, re-assessed, and if need be, corrected.

Keywords: Colonial, Ethnic, Perceptions, Warlike, Commissioner

1. Introduction

Ethnic tensions, conflicts and prejudices are prevalent in most parts of Africa. Some causes may be internally generated, such as the Ibo east and the Yoruba west in Nigeria which resulted in civil war in 1967; and the Baganda of the South and the Acholi of the North in Uganda characterized by tensions [1] (Cooper, 2002, p 8). However, one major factor emanates from the division of former homogenous ethnic entities into different countries through the demarcation of national boundaries by Europeans at the onset of formal colonization, such as the Akan in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, and the Ewe in Ghana and Togo. Within the same country too, the European colonisers adopted certain policies and attitudes, which raised one or other ethnic groups above others. The 1990s Rwandan genocide is largely blamed on Belgium's initial favouritism towards the Tutsis, a situation that gave them an elitist status vis-à-vis the Hutus. [2] (Cooper, 2002, p 8). Belgium inherited Rwanda from Germany, following the latter's defeat in the First World War. At the country's independence in 1962, representatives of the Hutu majority won the first elections. Since then, the two

ethnic groups became embroiled in ethnic tensions, leading to the genocide in the 1990s. In Ghana, the root cause in the case of the more developed South and the less developed North is often sought in British colonization under which the North was reserved as a labour reserve for the Gold Coast colony, while developments were concentrated in the South [3] (Thomas, 1973, PP79 – 103). Similarly, in 1884, Western Togoland was incorporated into the Togoland colony as a German possession. However, following Germany's defeat in the First World War, the colony of Togoland was divided between France and Britain as protectorates [4] (Amenumey, 2008, p 215). The western part of Togoland therefore became part of Britain's Gold Coast colony. By these divisions, some members of the Ewe ethnic group remained in the Togoland colony, while others found themselves in Ghana. Those in Ghana have always felt a sense of marginalization, and have attempted severally to secede without success. Culturally and linguistically, they have more in common with Togo than with Ghana. Just before Ghana's independence in 1957, a plebiscite had to be held to get the majority of them to agree to join the independent nation, and this was achieved largely because many of the non-Ewe groups in the Volta region where the Ewes are, voted to be part of Ghana. An attempt to

secede in 2017 failed, and just recently in March 2020, another attempt was nipped in the bud by the Ghana government [5] ([dw.com/en/ghana's-western-togoland-region-declares-sovereignty/a55051426](https://www.dw.com/en/ghana's-western-togoland-region-declares-sovereignty/a55051426)). Some leaders of the Homeland Study Group Foundation, an organization dedicated to the cause of the Ewe in Ghana were arrested, and about eighty (80) Ewes who protested their arrest were detained, but all of them were later released. Currently, an uneasy calm is prevailing but the Ewes in Ghana have not completely given up.

On his way back to Rome after a six-nation African tour in 1980, Pope John Paul II referred to his encounter with the Asantehene as his most "memorable moment" when asked by a journalist en route to the Vatican [6]. (Sarpong, 2012, p. 41). Yet, three different Italian magazines which Archbishop Emeritus, Peter K. Sarpong received from Italy some weeks following the Pope's tour, mentioned nothing about his visit to Kumasi, but rather resorted to describing the Asante as a barbarous ethnic group that relish in killing other human beings. Accordingly, the international journalists covering the event were dissuaded by their non-Asante Ghanaian counterparts in Accra from going with the Pope to Kumasi on 9th May 1980, apparently convincing them there was nothing spectacular in the city. Why would the Asante be described in such negative terms in contemporary times? The historical antecedent lies in colonial times, when they were this much depicted by the Europeans, particularly the British.

The aforementioned are a few cases of ethnic tensions, conflicts and prejudices in Africa, some of which are legacies of European colonization.

2. A Brief Note on the Asante

The Asante are part of the much larger Akan ethnic group in Ghana. The 2000 Population and Housing census identifies the other major ethnic groups to be Ga-Adangwe, Ewe, Guan, Gurma, Mole-Dagbon, Grusi, and Mande Busanga [7]. (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). The Akan main ethnic divisions include the Fante, Akwamu, Guan, Denkyira, Brong, Akyem, Kwahu, Sefwi, Wassa, Akwapim, Assin and Asante altogether constituting the dominant ethnic group in Ghana with about 49.1% of the country's population by 2000. The Asante accounts for about 14.8% of the entire Akan ethnic group [8]. (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). They are located within the dense tropical forest, loaded with a variety of minerals including gold. They were once a tributary state under Denkyira, but by the close of the seventeenth century, they had overpowered their former overlord, embarked on a series of conquest, and grew into an Empire, and remained the strongest in military and economic might within the Gold Coast up to about the beginning of formal colonization at the turn of the twentieth century.

2.1. Early Asante Contacts with Europeans

Through the maritime trade in both goods and slaves, the Europeans and the Asante were remotely in touch in the early years of the European advent, with the Fante and coastal

peoples being the intermediaries. As the Europeans consolidated their hold along the coast and began to penetrate the hinterland, direct contact was established between the two groups of people, with the Asante travelling to the coast as traders. More specific and direct contact through European presence in Kumasi include the residencies of T. E. Bowdich in 1817, and Joseph Dupuis in 1819, a visit to Kumasi by T. B. Freeman, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary in 1839, Andreas Riis of the Basel Mission in December the same year, a second visit by T. B. Freeman and the missionary Robert Brooking among others (a total of 340 people) in 1841, Rev. G. Chapman (successor of Freeman) with Rev. Hayfron from September 1843 to November 1844, and again from March to April in 1845, Governor W. Winniet, accompanied by T. B. Freeman in 1848 [9]. (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948, pp. 158-165). These early visits by these European missionaries were not fruitful in planting the Christian faith in Asante/Kumasi. Similarly those representing British colonial and economic interest did not also make any significant achievement in this period. Grave limitations militated against conversion. For example, during the visit of Andreas Riis in 1839, he was not allowed to move about freely though he had the opportunity to visit the Bantama Royal Mausoleum. His experience made him conclude that the period was not suitable for missionary work in Kumasi. Rev. Brooking was not also successful in starting a school. In 1881, Karl Buck and David Huppenbauer visited Kumasi where they were allowed occasional street preaching but not the establishment of a mission station [10]. (Debrunner, 1967. P 200). In September the same year, Ramseyer and Adolf Mohr also went to Kumasi [11] (Debrunner, 1967. P 200). Other visits were made to Kumawu in 1883, but the town was found to be in ruins as a consequence of civil disturbances in Asante since its decline started after the 1874 Sargrenti war [12]. (Debrunner, 1967, p. 100). In 1890, the Basel Mission successfully opened a mission outstation at Bompata [13] (Debrunner, 1967, p. 200). What can be deduced from these early interactions was that, the Asante Chiefs and their people were not ready to accept them. Security for the missionaries was also lacking because of the Asante-Fante and British wars of the nineteenth century, as well as civil disturbances as gradual decline set in following Asante defeat in the Sargranti war.

Consequently, after 1874, European presence in Asante/Kumasi started increasing steadily. From this year up to the close of the nineteenth century, British political hold on the Asante also increased dramatically, eventually culminating in formal colonization in the early years of the twentieth century. Indeed, in 1874, the Asantehene asked for a Methodist missionary to be sent to Kumasi. It was the turn of the Europeans this time to not honour the request because of security reasons, and which they did. Nevertheless, in 1876, the Rev. Picot (Methodist) arrived in Kumasi. The conditions under which Rev. Picot was supposed to work as stipulated by the Asantehene implied that the earlier request was not a genuine one towards mission work or

evangelization. He wanted Picot to be a peace broker between the Asante and the British, and within the Asante state, and help promote trade [14] (Debrunner, 1967, pp. 179-180). The request to start a school received the following response from the Asantehene:

‘You must understand that we will not select children for education, for the Ashanti children have better work to do than to sit down all day idly to learn ‘Hoy! Hoy! Hoy! They have to fun their parents, and do other work which is much better [15] (Debrunner, 1967, pp. 179-180).’

The above notwithstanding, six Methodist schools were established in Adansi though only three survived by 1884. Rev. R. S. Hayfron also opened mission stations at Amuaful, Bekwai and Dengyasi (near Kokofu). Hayfron’s work was commended by Rev. W. Terry Coppin, then Chairman of the Methodist Mission in the Gold Coast, when he visited Asante in 1885 [16]. (Debrunner, 1967, p. 181). These efforts could not be sustained because of the civil disturbances in Asante. Yet, partly in cognizance of these efforts, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) decided to leave Asante for the Basel and Methodist Missions. To tackle the issue in Asante, the Basel Mission decided to look for funds in England while waiting for a time when the safety of missionaries could be guaranteed. For this reason, the Reverends Schrenk, Ramseyer and Captain Glover undertook a tour of Britain [17]. (Debrunner, 1967, p. 190).

Therefore, up to dawn of the twentieth century, the Christian missions were yet to make a significant impact in Asante.

2.2. Aftermath of the Exile of Prempeh I

In 1896, the British exiled the Asantehene, Nana Agyeman Prempeh I, first to Sierra Leone, and later to the Seychelles Island, as one of the last moves in the century to bring Asante to its knees. One of the consequences of this was that, Asante was further weakened and opened more to British intervention. For example, Ramseyer received an invitation from the Governor to start mission work in Kumasi [18] (Ramseyer, n.d., pp. 8-11). In his response to this invitation, Ramseyer, together with his nephew, Edmond Perregaux arrived in Kumasi to start a mission, and thereafter, continued to work and expand throughout Asante [19]. (Ramseyer, n.d.). When the 1900 Yaa Asantewaa War broke out, Ramseyer and others ran to seek refuge at the coast, and mission work was discontinued. An indigenous missionary, Samuel Otoo from Larteh, who was stationed at Techimentia was killed, while another Catechist, Danso at Sekyedumase was saved by the fetish priest of the town [20]. (Debrunner, 1967, pp. 211-212). However, in 1902, the Basel Mission resumed work in Kumasi. From 1901 onwards, Asante received an inflow of other missions to complete the process of evangelizing the Asante, while trade also boomed with the arrival of merchants [21]. (Debrunner, 1967, pp. 212-213). On 1st January 1902, Asante was formally integrated into the Gold Coast Colony.

Some of these early European groups, whether as merchants, political officers or missionaries did identify the

Asante people with certain pejorative terms. While this pertained to the distant past, it appears their alleged sordid past haunts the present.

3. Evidence Supporting the Argument

3.1. Asante-Fante-British Wars in the 19th Century

The nineteenth century Asante-Fante-British wars constitute a landmark in Ghana history in which the Asante were either engaged with the Fante, the British, or with both at the same time, with the two usually being allies against the Asante [22] (Osei, 2004, pp. 24-71) (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948, pp. 140-153, 168-178, 202-212). Covertly, these wars may portray a warlike and aggressive nature of the Asante. However, a meticulous perusal of the causes of these wars may reveal a different picture altogether. From about 1806 to 1900, not less than ten of such conflicts involving the Asante, coastal states/Fante, and the British have been recorded. The first of these wars occurred in 1806 [23] (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948, p. 140). The cause of the war did not initially involve the Asante. It started as a misunderstanding between three Assin Chiefs: Amo Aday of Assin Apimanim (Eastern Assin) on the one hand, and Kwadwo Otibu and Kwaku Aputae of Assin Atandanso (Western Assin). One of Amo Aday’s sub-chiefs died, and Kwaku Aputae’s representative to the funeral decided to loot the grave for the gold ornaments buried with the deceased. His crime was detected, but Aputae refused to take punitive measures against the culprit. Since all three chiefs were vassals to the Asantehene, the case was taken to his court for arbitration. It was in the course of handling this matter that some messengers of the Asantehene were executed by Aputae and his men, who also did not honour the compensation he was charged to give to Amo Aday. Executing the Asantehene’s messengers was invitation to war. Kwaku Aputae and Kwadwo Otibu were pursued by the Asante Army to the coast where the two had taken refuge first at Asikuma, and later at Abora. A council of Fante chiefs met on their fate, and decided to not release them to the Asante for punishment. The Asante invaded the Fante coast, specifically Anomabu. In trying to perform a mediatory role and by giving shelter to the Fante refugees, the British got embroiled in the war. Amidst severe loss of human life, the Asante emerged victorious. Apart from revealing that this war was not started by the Asante, this account further clearly indicates that their mediatory role was repudiated, and their messengers killed. This vindicates the Asante as the group on the offensive.

In 1811, the Fante mobilised against Accra and Elmina as a move of regaining their supremacy over the coastal states after their defeat by the Asante [24]. (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948). Being an ally of the Asante, the people of Elmina asked for support from them, which was readily given. Akyem Abuakwa and Akyem became allies of the Fante in this war. The British and the Dutch remained neutral because they were made to understand the nature of the war by the Asante. This war was not also started by the Asante.

In 1814, the Asante launched an expedition against Akyem Abuakwa and Akwapim because they had allied with their adversaries in the 1811 war with the Fantes [25]. (Ward, 1948. p. 152). They started this war for the sake of revenge.

In 1824, the Asante fought with the British, the war, being named after the town in which the war took place - the Battle of Nsamankow [26] (Ward, 1948. p. 168-176 (Tieku, 2016). Though there were remote causes of the war, the immediate issue leading to the clash concerned a quarrel between an Asante trader at Anomabo and a sergeant of the Royal African Colonial Corps, during which the former used insulting words on the Governor, and the latter did same to the Asantehene. The sergeant was kidnapped by the Asante and executed at Dunkwa. The then governor of Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, Sir Charles McCarthy came down from Sierra Leone to start a war with the Asante. The Governor died in the course of the war, and the Asante emerged victorious. Again, this war was not started by the Asante, though their gruesome murder of the policeman fueled it. The British were the first to start mobilization. The Governor's military approach to solving the issue was not a wise decision.

In 1826, the British avenged their defeat by the Asante in 1824 by allying with Accra and other Ga groups, the Fante, Denkyira, Akyem and Akwamu, in what is known as the Battle of Akatamanso [27]. (Ward, 1948. p. 176-176. (Tieku, 2016). The war was occasioned by Asante attack on Accra to punish it for abandoning the early alliance of the two. The Asante with a much less military force, could not stand that of the allied forces estimated at about 11, 000, and was consequently defeated. The Asante started this war, and paid a price for their action.

There was another Anglo-Asante war in 1864 [28]. (Ward, 1948. p. 205-213, (Tieku, 2016). Two issues occasioned the war. The British gave protection to two Asante refugees. Kwasi Gyane, an old man who decided to keep for himself, a gold nugget he had found, and a slave boy who ran away from his master. British refusal to surrender these two resulted in war between the two. The war ended somehow indecisively because continuous rain and outbreak of fever and dysentery demoralized the British army, leading to their retreat with the Asante claiming victory. The causes of the war reveal British misunderstanding of Asante culture, even though their *casus belli* was that of fear of death of the refugees once they were released to the Asante.

In 1874, the British constituted a formidable force under Sir Garnet Wolseley and bombarded Kumasi, the capital of the Asante Empire, to break up its military might and subdue it. They succeeded in their bid as the weakening of the Asante state led to civil disturbances and attempts by tributary states to secede from the Empire. These civil disturbances would continue till the end of the century, and contributed significantly to the fall of the Asante Empire. This war was started by the British as a deliberate measure to crush Asante power.

Further in 1896, the Asantehene and some royals were exiled by the British to the Seychelles, after being kept in captivity first in Cape Coast, and again in Sierra Leone.

Indeed, there was no war in this case as the Asante surrendered under the threat of war, but were made to suffer the consequences of people defeated in war. The reason the British gave for their action was that the Asante had failed to honour the indemnity imposed at the end of the 1874 war.

In 1900, the last Anglo-Asante war took place when the Governor demanded to sit on the 'Golden Stool', the sacred stool and symbol of unity of the Asante people. This was an immediate cause against a background of hostilities between the British and the Asante. Though the British officials in Asante were compelled to retreat to the Cape Coast for safety, more Asante royals together with some slaves were exiled [29]. (Ivor, 200, p. 10). This war further confirmed the fact of British ignorance or misunderstanding of Asante culture and traditions.

It can be deduced from the eight wars cited above that it was not always that the Asante were on the offensive. They were sometimes provoked into fighting by the other ethnic groups, or the British.

Besides, it would have sounded logical to say that the Asante were warlike, aggressive and bloodthirsty, if the rest of the peoples of the Gold Coast had been without any involvement in war. However, this was not the case. There are records of wars and conflicts involving other ethnic groups in which the Asante were not part, as well as wars between other indigenous groups and Europeans/British [30]. (Ward, 1948. p 216). There is ample evidence of wars among the Ewe-speaking groups along the coast, as well as between them and others like the Ada. For example, in 1750, there was a war between the Anlo and the Ada [31]. (Ward, 1948. p 216). The Ada received support from Akwapim and Akyem Abuakwa, leading to the defeat of the Anlo. In 1776, the Anlo staged a war of revenge. As the war raged on, a Danish trader was seized and robbed by an Anlo group. Infuriated by this, the Danish Governor of Christianborg, together with other Danish authorities mobilized and raised forces in Accra, Ada, Akwapim and Krobo, and dealt a deadly blow to the Anlo in what came to be known as Sagbadare War (Sagbadare or swallow was the local nickname of the Danish trader who was attacked and robbed by the Anlo) [32]. (Ward, 1948. p 216).

Apart from the above evidence, inter-ethnic wars or conflicts were rampant in most parts of Africa in this period. In the modern nation states of West Africa can be found such examples in which one or two major ethnic groups dominated as the most powerful, bringing the others under their jurisdiction through conquest. In modern Nigeria was the Oyo state as well as Dahomey in modern Benin [33] (Adu Boahe, Ajayi Ade and Michael Tidy, 1986, pp. 54-101). Similarly, it was the Asante that occupied this dominant position in modern Ghana.

Besides, in Europe and America before 1945, wars were acceptable means of settling scores among states, and even among various groups within the same state [34]. (Rao, 1991, pp. 81-244). The number of years in which some of these wars lasted, and the human cost incurred in some of these wars, could not be compared to what happened in the Gold

Coast. Therefore, the Asante involvement in wars in this period should not have been a yardstick to measure the barbarity of the people.

3.2. Evidence from Missionary Activities – Freeman and Ramseyer in Asante

Apart from these inter-ethnic wars in which Asante featured as the superpower, a digest of Asante relations with the missionaries could throw more light on the situation. Two notable missionaries to Asante, Freeman and Ramseyer suffice here as case studies.

Before his first visit to Kumasi in 1839, T. B. Freeman had already received information concerning the ‘Tales of horror, wretchedness, and cruelty...’ about the Asante people [35]. (Freeman, 1968, p. 11). However, throughout his journey are reports of cordial interactions between him and the Asante sub-chiefs at Quisah, Fomena, among others, and eventually the same with the Asante overlord, Nana Kwaku Dua I when he eventually arrived in Kumasi. Indeed, Freeman preached to Korankye, the Chief of Fomena and his elders who were happy to receive the good news [36]. (Freeman, 1968, pp. 19-20). Apart from being detained at Quisah to seek the consent of the Asantehene before he could proceed to Kumasi, it was quite a pleasant interaction with the people at Adansi. While staying at Quisah, he visited Chief Korankye at Fomena several times and equally had amicable interactions with him. When Freeman finally entered Kumasi, he was warmly welcomed by the Asantehene, Nana Kwaku Dua I among a gathering of not less than forty thousand people [37] (Freeman, 1968, p. 48).

Apart from the horrible news of human sacrifices, confirmed by the hovering of hawks and turkey-buzzards over places where such was done, and the stench he smelt while passing by a dell containing the bodies of the sacrificed victims, Freeman’s visit to Kumasi was quite a memorable one [38]. (Freeman, 1968, p. 56). He had not been deliberately subjected to any form of maltreatment. The Asantehene even allowed him to crown it all with a visit to Bantama, a kind of ancestral home where relics of former chiefs are kept, and where Europeans or even Ashantis were then not allowed to visit, Freeman being the first European to have been accorded such by the Asantehene of the time (Nana Kwaku Dua II)[39]. (Freeman, 1968, p. 57). It should be noted that human sacrifices of this kind were then not peculiar to only the Asante people. It was a common practice of most groups of people across West Africa, and though horrendous in nature, and to the European of that age, would not have been considered so by those practicing it, including the Asante. Yet, on his return to Britain after his first visit to Kumasi, Freeman’s report about the Asante purported the people to be of a kind of rare inhuman species badly in need of salvation. What could have been the reason for his exaggerated account when similar things were happening in other parts of West Africa? First was his dire need for money for evangelisation, and such an account could achieve the purpose, and it actually did as he was able to raise an amount of five Thousand Pounds [40]. (Freeman, 1968, p. 86). In

addition to Freeman, his wife and a young man he went with from Cape Coast, De Graft, were other helping hands from Britain: Mr. and Mrs. Hesk, Mr. Watson, Mr. and Mrs. Shipman, Mr. Thackwray: and Mr. Walden [41]. (Freeman, 1968, p. 88). Therefore, his effort had achieved the desired result, but it was the Asante that bore the distasteful brand.

Another missionary who badmouthed the Asante in like terms is the Reverend Friedrich Augustus Louis Ramseyer, known simply as Ramseyer. Though a pioneer Basel missionary to Kumasi with many memorials to his credit, his one-time captivity in Kumasi and his desire to use the occasion to evangelise there made him assume a kind of intermediary role between the Asante and the British, some years after his release. Though he was not particularly assigned to the role, he imposed himself as such, and used every means possible, and within his reach to persuade the British to clamp down on the Asante [42]. (Arhin, pp. 7-8). Background to Ramseyer’s campaign against the Asante is necessary at this point. Ramseyer had not intended to start a mission in Asante yet. He was stationed as a missionary at Anum in 1868, then a German controlled area in present day Volta Region. It was during one of the Asante incursions in the area that he was captured together with his wife Rosa, their nine month old baby boy, Fritzchen, and a lay Christian, Johannes Kuhne (a Prussian technical mission staff of the Basel Mission) in June 1869 [43]. (Arhin, pp. 1-5). Kuhne was involved in the industrial processing of cotton and the export of it to Europe. Having lost their baby en route to Kumasi with the Asante Army, they were kept as political pawns, and were used to exact a ransom from the British, a total of 1000, a half of what was originally demanded by the Asante [44]. (Arhin, p. 3). Captivity in Kumasi was a happy one, characterized by many pleasantries from the Asante royalty, though they had to bear with thievery and thuggery by rascals [45]. (Arhin, p. 4) They were finally released in 1874 and they witnessed the humiliation of the Asante in the 1874 Sargrenti War during which Kumasi was destroyed. After some rest in Switzerland, the Ramseyers returned to the Gold Coast, settled first at Kyebi in Akyem Abuakwa, moved to Abetifi on the Kwahu Ridge, and while in residence there, continued to stretch out towards Kumasi by linking up with towns leading there, such as Bompata and Petrensa [46] (Ramseyer, n.d., pp. 5-6) Finally in 1896, following the capture and exile of Nana Otumfuo Agyeman Prempeh I, the Queen Mother (Asantehemaa), and some royal courtiers, Ramseyer was allowed by the British Governor to start a mission in Kumasi [47] (Ramseyer, n.d., p. 8)

From the last decades to the end of the nineteenth century, Ramseyer would make himself a dangerous self-styled spy and arbiter between the Asante and the British, and applied this position much to the disadvantage of the Asante [48]. (Arhin, pp. 7-12) The disruption of the Asante state as a result of the exile of their King had resulted in a situation where the smaller states like Nsuta and Nkoranza had started to renounce their allegiance to the Asantehene (or Kumasihene). Civil disturbances erupted within the Asante

state and some people fled for refuge elsewhere. Ramseyer's designation was that of a missionary, and from all the evidence available, a genuine one indeed. Yet, he did campaign vigorously against the Asante, strongly calling on the British to annex the Asante Kingdom, subdue it, and reduce its power over others. In doing this, he employed powerful language, sometimes loaded with lies and exaggerations to negate the Asante in order to win British consent for their annexation. Among his lies against the Asante was one in which he told the Governor of the Gold Coast that, the Nsutahene who had sought refuge in Atebubu had expressed interest in settling in the protectorate [49]. (Acting Governor Hodgson to the Secretary of State, 1889) He told this lie while he was still stationed at Abetifi in 1889. When an officer called Badger was sent to make enquiries about it, the Nsutahene said he had not mentioned any such intention to Ramseyer [50]. (Acting Governor Hodgson to the Secretary of State, 1889) He again alleged that some people from Juabin who were refugees at Konongo wanted to be given a place to settle in the Protectorate, and again mentioned that his fellow missionaries at Abetifi wanted British rule over Asante. He emphasized his stake in the following:

'For humanity's sake, for the welfare of the country, for the real peace of all the tribes of the Gold Coast and for the benefit of the spreading of the word of salvation which must be brought to all nations, we the missionaries of Abetifi take the liberty to ask the British Government to do the finishing stroke and bring Kumase and all that is remaining of Ashantee under the British Flag [51]. ' (Ramseyer to Acting Governor, 1893)

In the above excerpt, Ramseyer portrayed the Asante as a warlike people disturbing the peace of others, and therefore was badly in need of salvation. He further urged Scott, Commander of the British expedition to Atebubu to attack the Asante from the rear. This urging by Ramseyer could not materialize as the Secretary of State vetoed against the idea of the Governor and Scott to carry out the attack. Following this failed attempt, Ramseyer carried an appeal to Lord Garnet Wolseley in London, hoping that as the conquerer of Asante in 1874, he would give heed to his desire. He employed lurid accounts about the Asante to arouse Wolseley's sympathy to get the British government to yield to his demand.

One incident which gave Ramseyer the opportunity in this regard, involved the Asante, Nkoranza and Atebubu. The Asantehene had failed to reclaim allegiance from the Chiefs of Nkoranza, being one example of the renunciation of Asante domination by tributary states following the decline of the Asante Empire. Atebubu allied with Nkoranza against the Asante, but since the British forbade Atebubu from any form of military action without recourse to it, as enforced by a treaty of protection involving the two, signed in November, 1890, Atebubu could not openly give military support to her ally [52]. (Arhin, p. 7). However, in a situation where the British sought every means to quell Asante power, Atebubu seized the prevailing climate to send thirty-gun men to the

aid of Nkoranza under the pretext of securing its borders against any Asante attack. Employing this excuse to get the British to be convinced, the two allies and the Asante became embroiled in military engagements, but since the focus of the paper is not so much on the wars but how they tended to give reasons for Asante to be selectively projected in a certain light, detailed accounts cannot be given. Among other things, Ramseyer used this occasion to accuse the Asante of attacking Nkoranza for refusing to pay tribute in slaves, burnt their towns and kept 2000 women and children captive, describing the Asantehene as 'bloodthirsty [53].' (Ramseyer to Lord Wolseley, 1894) To the chagrin of Ramseyer, a British column under Sir Francis Scott, the Inspector-General of the Gold Coast Constabulary, which was sent to frighten off the Asante decided to withdraw, following the decampment of the Asante Army near Atebubu. It needs to be pointed out however that, though Ramseyer was on his own carrying out this spectacular duty of carrying out espionage, the British Governor, at a point specifically assigned him to it as a way of assisting its colonial agent, Ekem Ferguson who was then negotiating for British control of the areas lying to the north of Asante [54]. (Acting Governor to Ramseyer, 1893)

What then was Ramseyer's motive in badmouthing the Asante to the British? He came to the Gold Coast purposely for missionary work, but his efforts were thwarted by the lack of peace and security. He was captured at Anum and kept in captivity by the Asante for some years. Upon his release, he could not restart in Kumasi, the capital of the Asante, but rather, its southern fringes in Kwahu. In his desperation to move northwards through Kumasi, the need for a peaceful environment was paramount, but the disintegration of the Asante Empire and the resultant civil disputes became an obstacle. Analysing the causes of these wars, Asante could not have solely been responsible. All the Akan areas lying north to Asante were all part of the colony of Asante in the colonial period. Besides, some of these areas still owe some kind of allegiance to the Asante Stool (Asantehene) in contemporary times, and the Asantehene mediates in their political and other issues. For example, between 1981 and 1985, the Asantehene Nana Opoku Ware II elevated sixteen stools in the then Brong-Ahafo Region to paramountcy status, and did same for four other stools in 1996 [55]. (Osei, 2004, pp. 100-101). Despite the objection to this by the anti-Asante factions in these areas, the situation never reached a boiling point. Therefore, what these Bono towns owed Asante then and now, was what it sought to reclaim, but the British tried to prevent it.

Ramseyer therefore had his own reasons for wanting the British to subdue the Asante, and in his desperation, a Basel missionary that he was, threw every caution to the wind and adopted methods which somehow run contrary to Basel ways. For instance, the Basel missionaries forbade the sale gun, gunpowder and related items in their trade, indicating a distaste for wars. This is not to say that Ramseyer favoured war, but his role as spy, in which he sometimes exaggerated and lied, bore seeds for war not only between the Asante and

the British, but between the Asante and her tributary states.

3.3. Evidence from British Political and Economic Interests

Though the Asantehene had earlier requested for a British resident in Kumasi, it was in 1817 that the first British expedition was sent to Kumasi [56]. (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948, p. 158) The group was made up of T. E. Bowdich and William Hutchison, who were both writers in the Company's service, Henry Tedlie (a surgeon), and led by Frederick James, commandant of James Fort in Accra. Hutchison was designated to be the first British Resident in Kumasi. Though the group received a warm welcome from the Asantehene, the mission did not end on a pleasant note. First was a misunderstanding concerning castle notes from Anomabu and Cape Coast forts which were the Asante were entitled to following their victory in the 1806 war. The Asantehene raised the issue of underpayment which was confirmed and rectified. That settled, a treaty was signed between the British and the Asante. The two copies of the treaty, of which one was kept by the Asantehene, and the other sent to the coast by Bowdich were not identical. With the discrepancies inherent, the treaty could not hold, and Hutchison's Residency in Kumasi was also curtailed. In this episode, one could realize a willing Asante discouraged by a lack of cooperation on the side of the British.

In 1819, Joseph Dupuis was appointed by the British Crown as consul to Kumasi [57]. (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948, p. 164). He arrived in Kumasi in February 1820, after being in Cape Coast since January, 1819. Negotiations concerning castle notes were held between him and the Asantehene. Among other complaints, the Asantehene stated that they were paid in kind with the Asante supplying carriers for the goods, and that the Governor overcharged him for goods he supplied, sometimes charging up to 50% to the normal price of the goods [58]. (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948) The Asantehene further made reference to the discrepancies in the treaty signed with Bowdich. Consequently, a new treaty concerned with the preservation of peace and trade, protection for traders, and keeping trade paths clear was signed on 23rd March 1820. It was made up of twelve clauses in addition to three supplementary clauses. Dupuis returned to Cape Coast in early April with the treaty, but the Governor and his council refused to ratify it, though it was the Crown's duty to do so [59]. (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948, p. 165) Apparently, no mention of it was made to the Crown by the Governor. The Asante ambassadors who went with Dupuis to the coast carrying presents with them for King George were not allowed passage in the ship set sail for Britain. Dupuis' intervention in this matter was disregarded. He promised the Asantehene that he would put the matter before the Crown in England, but nothing was heard of him again. After about ten months of waiting without any response, the Asantehene stopped his people from visiting Cape Coast and other British forts for trade, but maintained trade with the Danes and the Dutch [60]. (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948, p. 166) In this second

attempt, the Asante and the British parted ways as allies because the latter clearly turned down any effort on the Asante part for friendship and cooperation. Dupuis however, saw the Asante in a different light, for he had told the yet to-be Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Charles Macarthy in England, that they were favourably disposed for friendship. On the contrary, many British thought otherwise about them and rather chose to describe them as 'treacherous and tyrannical savages' to McCarthy [61]. (Ward, A Political History of the Gold Coast, 1948, p. 167) This would make him adopt a hostile attitude towards the Asante, leading to his early death on his arrival as Governor of the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. In these instances can be seen Asante readiness for negotiation, but which the British often turned down while adopting a stereotypical stand against their counterpart.

4. The Narrative Changes Under Formal Colonization

The reaction of British colonial authorities to issues pertaining to the Asante under formal colonization gives a more amenable predisposition. In the period from 1902 to 1957, a total of thirteen British men had served as Chief Commissioners of Asante (CCA), renamed as Chief Regional Officers (CROs) from 1952 [62] (Wilks, 2000, p. 68). Despite remarkable events like the exile of the *Asantehene* in 1896, his return as *Kumasihene* in 1924, the restoration of the Asante Confederacy in 1935, the relationship between the British colonial officers and the Asante state dramatically changed the narrative of their opinion of a non-compromising state to a cooperative one.

Recognition and respect for Asante culture and traditions accounted for the good relations between the Asante and the British in this period. For example, Francis Charles Fuller, CCA from 1905 to 1919 successfully revived and reconstituted the Council of Kumasi, which had ceased to perform as the effective central government of Asante since 1896. Though the Council was concerned more with the Kumasi Division, Fuller as CCA, presided over it and through that role, was able to exert its influence over the whole of Asante [63]. (Wilks, 2000, p. 72). It therefore became only a matter of theory that Kumasi had no right to interfere in the issues of the other Divisions, but in practice Fuller was in control of all. Before this period, no British official could interfere this much in Asante affairs. The role of the revived Council in managing the affairs of the Asante state without the Asantehene was so remarkable that Fuller was referred to as 'the Great Father of Ashantees [64]'. (PRAAD, 1930). Fuller in his retirement also wrote about the Asante people as 'a valiant, clever, and lovable people, of whom it is no exaggeration to say that they bear no malice and nurse no grievance [65]. (Fuller, 1921, p. 229). He further captioned their relationship with the British in the following words:

'...the staunch loyalty of the ASHANTIS towards the British Government and their many fine qualities have gained

them the respect and admiration of all who have been fortunate enough to labour with and for them [66] (Fuller, 1921, p. 229).

The CCA from 1920 to 1923, C. H. Harper realized the need to study the people's culture. With this anthropological view, he instituted an Anthropological Department with the permission of Governor Guggisberg [67]. (Wilks, 2000, p. 80). The anthropologist, R. S. Rattray, was made to head the Department, and in that capacity, wrote and published among other works, the Ashanti, which was published by Oxford University Press in 1923. Indeed, Harper's respect for some aspects of Asante culture made him raised concerns of its 'pollution' by the unregulated spread of Christianity and the general impact of European ways [68]. (Wilks, 2000, p. 80).

John Maxwell, CCA from 1924 to 1930 did not depart from the ways of his predecessor, C. H. Harper. He instituted the 'Ashanti Native Jurisdiction Ordinance' in 1924, and referred to it as their 'Magna Carta'. He further saw to the return of the exiled Nana Agyeman Prempeh I to Kumasi in 1924, not as Asantehene, but Kumasihene [69] (Wilks, 2000, p. 85). On his opinion about the Asante people, the successor of Maxwell, Harry Scott Newlands had this to say

'...it came as something of a revelation to find how entirely different in their political outlook the Ashantis are from the Colony Peoples, how proud they are of the great historical position they held on the Gold Coast, and how strong is their feeling that the time will come when they will again be a united nation [70]'. (PRO, 1932, p. 12)

Despite the varied opinions by the European colonial officers of the effect of the restoration of the Asante Confederacy on the colonial state, it was eventually restored on 31st January, 1935. The Asantehene Nana Agyeman Prempeh II thanked the British Government and its officials in the Gold Coast in a letter he addressed to the Governor, Sir Arnold Hodson, with a special tribute to Harry Scott Newlands, for being the originator of the idea of the restoration of the Asante Confederacy [71] (Wallace-Johnson, 1935, pp. 36-37). Although modernity would crop into the way in which the much territorially reduced Asante state would be ran from this period onwards, its unique features have been maintained, making it one of the most enduring and lasting traditional institutions in Africa.

5. Conclusion

A number of factors accounted for the negative perceptions the Europeans had about the Asante people, the British in particular. Up to 1900, was the need for peace to prevail in the Gold Coast for European missionaries, merchants, political officers and other categories of Europeans to achieve their various agenda. Their interests clashed with a state that resisted European domination with a desire to be the superpower among the various ethnic groups in the country. With the departure of the Danes in 1850, and the Dutch in 1872, Britain emerged as the colonizing power of the Gold Coast, and used every possible means to subdue the Asante. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, depicting the Asante in pejorative terms was one such means

used either consciously or unconsciously to justify British clamp down on the Asante Empire. After 1900, the narrative would change with the British making reference to the Asante on friendly terms. In other words, their relations came to be characterized by cooperation and understanding, yet the earlier negative perceptions have become a basis for the denigration of the Asante in modern times.

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