

**“Professional sentimentalists”: Internecine conflicts
in the emergent Gold Coast**

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**PAS Working Papers
Number 26**

Series Editor

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Abstract

This paper examines conflictual relationships among British members of the Gold Coast administration. It adds to the literature that problematizes earlier notions of colonialism by highlighting tensions and contradictions inherent in colonial governance structures. This paper argues that at its inception, the Gold Coast colonial administration had deep cracks as a result of personal and interest group conflicts, as well as policy incoherence between the War and Colonial Office in England and the local administration. These contradictions in the colonial structure provided an avenue by which the Gold Coast elite influenced the character and policy direction of the colonial state from its inception.

Scholarly reexamination of colonialism has contributed to a greater understanding of the complexities of the colonial encounter. Scholars from various disciplinary orientations have highlighted the errors of homogenous conceptions of colonialism (Comaroff 1989; Cooper 2005; Lange, Mahoney, and von Hau 2006; Lawrance, Osborne, and Roberts 2006; Steinmetz 2007); however these insights have a longer history. As far back as 1945, Malinowski counselled anthropologists studying colonial societies that European colonial settlers were rarely a unified whole, and were often locked in conflicts of various kinds. Decades later Ann Stoler (1989: 136) observed that this advice has largely gone unheeded, and scholars continue to take “the politically constructed dichotomy of colonizer and colonized as a given, rather than a historically shifting pair of societal categories that needs to be explained.”

This study builds on this resurgence of interest in the actual dynamics of the operation of empire. Specifically, it explores personal and professional relationships between British administrators and merchants on the Gold Coast. I focus on hierarchical relationships between the War and Colonial Office in England and the local Gold Coast administration in Accra, as well as the lateral relations between the British residents on the coast.¹ Even though these relationships were often of a very personal nature, I argue that underlying them was a struggle over the administration of the Gold Coast that affected the coherence of the administration, which affected the formulation and implementation of colonial policy, creating a space within which the African elite contributed to shaping the colonial state.

The internecine conflicts that characterized the Gold Coast administration in the 19th century can be understood as a form of organizational conflict. Scholars of organizational conflict

¹ During the period dealt with in this paper, the Colonial Office did not exist as a separate entity. The first Colonial Office operated from 1768–1782 and mostly administered the North American colonies while the Home Office dealt with the rest of the colonies. In 1801 authority for the non-North American colonies was transferred to the War Office and renamed the War and Colonial Office, which in 1854 was divided into separate War and Colonial Offices.

conceptualize it by reference to elements of the conflict situation: antecedent conditions, subjective states, and behaviors that typically involve “a gradual escalation to a state of disorder” (Pondy 1967: 299). For the purposes of this study, Kenneth Thomas’s definition is apposite: “the process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his” (Thomas 1976: 891). This is often motivated by a competition for scarce resources or the power to define organizational goals (Pondy 1967). In the case of the Gold Coast, the main “resource” at stake was the control of the administration, which was in turn closely tied with the commercial fortunes of the British merchants. The fact that these merchants also served as government officials exacerbated these conflicts; however, these conflicts were not always overt. Like most organizational conflicts, they were sometimes manifested in nonaggressive, subtle, or covert forms such as sabotage or subversion (Morrill, Zald, and Rao 2003).

Certain personality styles are more amenable to conflict resolution than others. For instance, in a study of the relationship between personality and conflict management styles, Antonioni (1998) finds that people with extravertive personalities are more likely to adopt dominating styles. In contrast, those with agreeable or open personality types are more likely to adopt integration and use avoidance to manage conflict situations. Thomas (1976) also develops a taxonomy of approaches to handling conflict, singling out five strategies: compromise, avoidance, accommodation, collaboration, and competition. These strategies can be aligned on a continuum that has assertiveness on the one hand and cooperation on the other. When the head of an organization adopts a cooperative approach, she tends to get more positive results (Goleman 2000). This study illustrates how governors’ personalities affected these conflicts and their implications for colonial policies.

Administrative control of the Gold Coast at the turn of the nineteenth century

In 1821 the British government dissolved the Company of Merchants that was then administrating the Gold Coast and took direct control of the forts. Three years later Sir Charles MacCarthy, the governor placed in charge of the administration, precipitated a war with the powerful inland state of Asante, leading to the defeat of the British and the death of MacCarthy himself. Stung by these events, the British government withdrew and handed over the administration to a committee of merchants in London who governed via their agents on the Gold Coast. The new administration received a parliamentary subvention of only £4,000. The Gold Coast committee of merchants appointed Captain George Maclean as president in 1828. Maclean's appointment marked a turning point in the affairs of the Gold Coast. He succeeded in brokering a treaty of peace in 1831 between the neighboring states on the coast and the Asante empire (Metcalf 1955; Nathan 1904), which ended hostilities and led to the expansion of trade. Under his leadership, exports increased over two-fold from £131,000 in 1831 to £325,000 in 1840 (Gocking 2005: 32).

Maclean's personal influence led to the expansion of the British sphere of influence in the Gold Coast (Cruikshank 1853). Previously, British relations did not extend beyond trade. Much of what Maclean achieved depended upon his personal reputation of integrity and impartiality, which was acknowledged even by nationalist figures such as Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford (1926) and John Mensah Sarbah (1910). Nevertheless, British critics in London complained that he was not doing enough to suppress slavery on the Gold Coast. In addition, rumors about the circumstances of the death of his socialite wife shortly after her arrival on the coast generated ill-will against him. These led to the appointment of a commissioner, Dr. Richard Robert Madden, to investigate the affairs of the Gold Coast settlements. His findings and the report of a parliamentary

select committee became the basis for the imperial government to resume administrative control, which antagonized the coastal British mercantile community. Andrew Swanzy (1874) described Madden's arrival as an "evil hour."

In August 1843 Forster and Smith of New City Chambers, one of the trading houses that employed many of British agents, addressed a letter to the War and Colonial Office that sought to acquit Maclean of the charges made against him.² In part, they based their case on an extract from a letter from Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman, a Wesleyan missionary on the Gold Coast, in which he expressed the highest regards for the services and character of Maclean. According to Forster and Smith, Freeman's statements refuted "the calumnies which have been circulated by professional sentimentalists." These professional sentimentalists included Madden, whose report they claimed contained "calumnious mis-statements." This letter demonstrated differences between the British mercantile class in the metropole and their agents in colony, which deepened into sharp colonial policy, providing an avenue for the educated African mercantile class to shape the course of politics in the incipient colonial state.

Although the imperial government assumed direct control of the colony, it still depended on the British residents and merchants, as well as the educated African elite, to keep the machinery of the administration working. To consolidate metropolitan control, the War and Colonial Office appointed a lieutenant governor (later governor), colonial secretary, and a colonial chaplain and stationed a garrison of the West Indian Regiment in the colony. This arrangement set the stage for a long period of acrimonious relations between the colonial administration and coastal interest groups.

² Forster and Smith to War and Colonial Office (W&CO), August 30, 1843, CO 96/3, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA).

“Despotic authority”: Henry Worsley Hill

From the beginning, the reversion of the administration back to the British government was marked by much disorder and conflict. Soon after Lieutenant Governor Henry Worsley Hill's arrival on the Gold Coast in February 1844, he faced opposition from the English residents. In March he requested the commander of a British vessel to take him on a tour of inspection of the coastal forts, but the commander declined, stating that “the urgency of the case does not appear...sufficient” to justify his immediate compliance.³ A few months after this incident, when Maclean went on leave, Hill asked Francis-Swanzy, a British merchant, to occupy the post in Maclean's absence, which Swanzy refused, saying that he could not take time away from his business activities.⁴

Hill's most acrimonious conflicts, however, were with Maclean himself. The first glimpse of the sour relations between them emerged when Hill declined Maclean's claims for repayment of loans he had advanced to two Asante princes, John Ansah and William Quantamissah, who had been delivered as hostages to Maclean by the king of Asante in the 1830s to seal a treaty of peace. They had been sent to England to be educated. On their return to the coast, they received quarterly allowances from the British government. Maclean personally gave them cash advances before their allowances arrived each quarter. But when Hill took over, he declined to deduct Maclean's cash advance from the princes' allowances, claiming it was a personal transaction for which Maclean should not expect the governor's official intervention. When this was brought to the attention of the War and Colonial Office, they merely noted, in their characteristic dismissive style, that “the Lt Gov and assessor are not on good terms.”⁵ According to Hill, the animosity resulted from his

³ F. Scott to W&CO, March 21, 1844, CO 96/4, TNA.

⁴ Hill to W&CO, June 16, 1844, CO 96/4, TNA.

⁵ W&CO minute by Mr Hope November 23, 1844, Hill to CO, August 3, 1844, CO 96/4, TNA.

“superseding an Officer who had for so many years conducted the Government as Captain Maclean, and placing him in an inferior situation under the new Government.”⁶

In another incident, Maclean refused to respond to a request by Hill for explanation about some charges made by a Fante man against Maclean. Not only had he ignored the request, but he had also sent a copy of Hill’s letter to his confidante, Brodie Cruickshank, complaining about the language of Hill’s letter. Cruickshank, in response, sent an angry letter to Hill, who later complained to the War and Colonial Office that “[i]t certainly is evident that if the assessor forwards to all persons for their animadversions the communications that pass between him and the Governor, there must be *an end to all confidence and unity of action* [author’s emphasis] between the assessor and Governor.”⁷ In an internal minute, officials at the War and Colonial Office noted that “[t]his is the second complaint of Captain Hill’s violence of language toward his subordinate Officers, so that it is not improbably well founded.” But they chose not to intervene: “It appears to me that complaints of this kind are best disposed of by a dry and cold reception of them. Affronts for which no sympathy is felt by others are not likely to be felt very acutely by the immediate object.”⁸

This “dry and cold reception” did nothing to thaw the relationship between Hill and Maclean. In July 1844, Hill removed some lamps from the lighthouse in Cape Coast and halted an exercise known as “dropping the ball,” by which vessels sailing past the castle set their time. Maclean took offence, and complained to the War and Colonial Office and the Admiralty that these changes posed a danger to ships using Cape Coast roads. Hill replied that the practice of “dropping the ball” was merely a pastime of Maclean’s, and that all the chronometers and

⁶ Hill to W&CO, August 6, 1844, CO 96/4, TNA.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Internal W&CO minute on Hill’s dispatch to W&CO, August 6, 1844, CO 96/4, TNA.

mathematical instruments used were Maclean's personal property. Since no one on the coast was qualified to use these instruments, Hill accused Maclean of irresponsible conduct, alleging that in the indulgence of his hobby, this practice might have misled captains "to risk the correctness of their Chronometers and consequently the safety of their vessels": I firmly believe he is flattering himself when he fancies the Practice was appreciated so much as he represents; no expressions of dissatisfaction with the discontinuance of the practice have reached me.⁹

The bad blood between these two top ranking officials continued unabated, reaching new depths when Hill, "by accident," began chancing on incriminating information against his adversary. In October 1844 Hill forwarded a document that he claimed to have "chanced upon" that indicated Maclean was a local agent of London merchants Forster and Smith, and thus was implicated in various conflicts of interest. Hill claimed that this possibly accounted for the continuing opposition against him from resident merchants.¹⁰ The following year he further discovered evidence of Maclean's complicity in domestic slave dealing.

Apart from Maclean, Hill had other adversaries. Early in his administration, he had suggested that an abandoned fort at Anammaboe (now spelt Anomabu) be reoccupied and appointed Cruickshank as magistrate of this post. Cruickshank "decline[d] giving up his time to decide the constant calls arising from the petty disputes of the natives."¹¹ Some opposition against Hill was occasioned by certain decisions he took; for instance, his habit of retrying and resentencing cases already adjudicated by the magistrates. In one such case he convicted a man

⁹ Hill to W&CO, February 1, 1845, CO 96/6, TNA.

¹⁰ Hill to W&CO, October 15, 1844, CO 96/4, TNA. In a letter to Maclean dated March 7, 1845, Joseph Smith made the same charge against Hill, saying that "Among the information he is raking against you, he has caused to be summoned before the Judicial Assessor Quashie William, formerly a Blacksmith in the Fort, and the two Bricklayers who represented themselves, when working in the Fort, as belonging to Mr. George Brown, in order to elicit from them what he could have against you." CO 96/8, TNA.

¹¹ Hill to W&CO, August 7, 1844, CO 96/4, TNA.

who had been acquitted, observing that: “I consider in this case the magistrates had too speedily come to the conclusion that the transaction was not illegal.”¹²

Further drawing ire, Hill introduced unpopular administrative reforms. He initiated a new Commission of the Peace that changed the order of seniority of the magistrates. Shortly thereafter, he traveled on official duties to England where he used the new administrative arrangement to appoint James Lilley, the colonial surgeon, as acting lieutenant governor. Cruickshank, one of the longest residents on the Gold Coast, objected to this as a blatant abuse of power:

Lieutenant Governor... has arbitrarily and capriciously changed the rotation of the other magistrates, placing three magistrates junior to myself above me and two magistrates senior to me below me... I therefore beg leave to appeal to your Lordship against the exercise of such despotic authority on the part of the Lieutenant Governor, as being entirely destructive of the efficiency and independence of the magistrates. The same capricious movement...might have led to the entire suppression of the Commissions, or to the exclusion at least, of those magistrates who did not choose to be subservient to the Lieutenant Governor’s will.¹³

Complaints of Hill’s abuse of power also came from sources outside the administration. Recently returned from the Gold Coast, a British merchant, J. I. Sandeman, accused Hill of arbitrarily introducing silver coins as legal tender on the coast and compelling every merchant to receive them in exchange for merchandise, under threat of prosecution. When he returned to England, this unhappy merchant tried to redeem his large accumulation of these coins only to discover “much to my astonishment, I cannot get them disposed of otherwise than by selling them for Old Silver thereby losing about Ten Per Cent.”¹⁴ In another case, the commander of an American shipping vessel complained of “having been detained and his vessel searched by the Governor... and of the refusal of the Governor to grant him a certificate of the said detention.”¹⁵

¹² Hill to W&CO, February 27, 1845, CO 96/6, TNA.

¹³ Cruickshank to W&CO, March 17, 1845, enclosed in J. Lilley to CO, CO 96/7, TNA.

¹⁴ J. Sandeman to W&CO, August 2, 1845, CO 96/8, TNA.

¹⁵ Statement by J. Sturdivant, enclosed in Foreign Office to W&CO, CO 96/8, TNA.

These feelings of enmity were apparently so raw that in a long-running case of abuse of office, insubordination, and financial mismanagement against colonial chaplain Rev. Augustus William Hanson, the magistrates were reluctant to assist Hill in prosecuting the case, although they resented the chaplain just as much as they did Hill:

[O]f the other three gentlemen to whom I had applied, Mr Topp also declined giving his testimony, and from neither Mr F. Swanzy [n]or Mr G Smith have I received a reply to this date.... and finding the Officers and Magistrates of the colony so reluctant to come forward as evidence either in justice to Mr Hanson, or the office of Chaplain, I had much difficulty in proceeding with the case.¹⁶

Residents' refusal to cooperate with the lieutenant governor was one of the material manifestations, and consequences, of the tensions between the British residents and the British administrators who, nevertheless, had to work together in the colonial government. The earlier refusal of Francis Swanzy and Cruickshank to take up crucial positions shows how these tensions had the potential to cripple or deeply undermine the functioning of the administration. Less than two years into Hill's tenure, he returned to England where he resigned from his position. In the Gold Coast, Joseph Smith, an African merchant and magistrate, wrote to Maclean (then on sick-leave in England) observing that "Governor Hill leaving the Colony for England has not left any stone unturned to annoy people of all Classes in this Country."¹⁷

"A singularly acrimonious feeling": James Lilley

Acting Lieutenant Governor James Lilley was only in office a few months before the earlier patterns of conflicts reemerged with even greater intensity. In November 1845 a serious conflict broke out between him and the head of the troops stationed on the coast. Lilley asked the commander of the troops, Captain Smith, to station sentries at the colonial secretary's office to

¹⁶ Hill to W&CO, March 9, 1846, CO 96/10, TNA.

¹⁷ J. Smith to Maclean, March 7, 1845, CO 96/8, TNA.

guard the colonial treasury. This request riled the captain who retorted: “I beg most respectfully to observe, that your letter being tantamount to an order, I wish it to be distinctly understood, that I cannot acknowledge any order that does not emanate [sic] from a Senior Military Officer.”¹⁸ Faced with this refusal to carry out his order, Lilley attempted to place the commander under “close arrest”; however, the second senior officer refused to arrest his superior.

Other personal affronts led Lilley to threaten other military officers with arrest. First was Assistant Surgeon Powell, whose offence was to have walked past the lieutenant governor “without paying me the usual compliment of a salute due to my position, and...I consider he thereby offers an indignity to my authority.”¹⁹ Two months later, he placed another officer, Lt. Craig, under arrest for allegedly making threatening remarks about him and sending him an insulting message. Craig was sent to London for trial; however, before leaving he took care to procure from the English merchants on the Gold Coast letters “bearing testimony to the respect uniformly shown by Lt Craig to the Ag Gov & to his general good conduct.” On the basis of these letters, he was acquitted of the charge.²⁰

Lilley’s most serious clashes were with the English merchants. They accused him of abusing the various offices he concurrently held as governor and colonial surgeon for personal gain, claiming that he charged exorbitant fees for his medical services, even though he drew the full salary as surgeon, and a half salary as governor.²¹ As acting governor, Lilley was responsible for inspecting and issuing certificates of health and safety to all shipping vessels docking at Cape Coast port. Since he was also the medical officer responsible for the certification of the safety of

¹⁸ H. Smith to Lilley, October 8, 1845, enclosed in Lilley to W&CO, November 22, 1845, CO 96/7, TNA.

¹⁹ Lilley to Captain Smith, November 24, 1845, enclosed in W. Winniett to W&CO, June 13, 1846, TNA.

²⁰ Minute by Mr Stephen, September 21, 1846.

²¹ W Hutton to W&CO, October 13, 1845, CO 96/8, TNA.

the vessel and its crew, conflicts arose between him and the sailors about the propriety of his charging fees for this service.

Moreover, complaints arose about his fees for attending to the sick. Thomas Hutton alleged that “his charges are monstrous, both as Surgeon and for Fees as Acting Governor.”²² Charles Bannerman, son of wealthy British-Fante merchant James Bannerman, corroborated Hutton’s claims, charging that “his conduct in every respect both as Governor and Doctor has been uniformly avaricious and grasping,” and referred to his fees as “greedy impositions.”²³ Meanwhile in London, Forster and Smith buttressed these complaints by forwarding to the War and Colonial Office still more complaints pertaining to Lilley’s medical fees:

We are also informed that he charges for his attendance on the militia, and has his charges deducted from their scanty pay, and not only are the charges general, but exorbitant, even to the poor natives. ...Nor do foreigners visiting the place escape when compelled to seek advice... Nor are these the only complaints of the kind that have been reported to us. But we wish merely to state sufficient to justify enquiry...and as attaching to the liberal and humane profession to which Dr Lilly belongs we can conceive nothing more calculated to lower the British name in that part of the world both in the eyes of the natives and foreigners visiting the place... In making this representation to Earl Grey we beg most distinctly to disclaim any personal feeling in the matter toward Dr Lilley, who is personally unknown to us.²⁴

Although Forster and Smith denied any “personal feeling” in these accusations, Lilley, in his response, attributed the accusations against him to personal hostilities. First, he painted Charles Bannerman as an embittered man because of a declined job application. Concerning his medical fees, Lilley explained that he took as precedent the charges made by the previous colonial surgeon during the incumbency of the Committee of Merchants under Maclean, “and which he [the former colonial surgeon] received without any demur on the part of the Merchants, because he was their Servant but because I am a Government Officer, I am expected to give my labour (on the Coast of

²² Extract of letter from Hutton, August 9, 1845, enclosed in Hutton to W&CO, October 13, 1845, CO 96/8, TNA.

²³ Extract of a letter from C. Bannerman, August 7, 1845, enclosed in CO 96/8, TNA.

²⁴ Forster and Smith to W&CO, September 25, 1846, CO 96/10, TNA.

Africa too!) to them without any remuneration.” He went on to say that Hutton, who first made these charges, had been allegedly stated that he was going “to test whether I am not only bound to attend to them, but to do so without any remuneration.”²⁵ In his view Hutton’s attitude was symptomatic of the hatred of the British merchants who had previously governed the Gold Coast:

I think I have pretty clearly indicated the animus of this Gentleman’s conduct. There is a singularly acrimonious feeling on his part to everything and everyone connected with the Government and towards me in particular, for having, as he conceives, supplanted him in the administration of the Government. It wounded his pride and he has sought his revenge.²⁶

Lilley got his chance to settle his personal scores with Hutton. In November 1845 William Jacobs, an African clerk employed by Hutton, was tried for embezzling twenty-four pounds of gold dust and fourteen dollars. Jacobs was found guilty and sentenced to serve a prison term with hard labor until he had fully refunded the monies. Lilley took issue with the verdict, which he claimed “appeared to me to be totally subversive of Public Justice” and could result in “the encouragement of a recurrence of similar acts of dishonesty.” He scrapped the original conviction, replacing it with a fixed term of two years with hard labor without requiring him to repay the monies embezzled. Although Lilley acknowledged that this new verdict was injurious to the interests of Hutton, he claimed that his move was purely to secure a more perfect justice: “It is doubtless a great hardship for Mr Hutton to lose his Property, but I cannot conceive myself justified in permitting the ends of Public Justice to be made subservient to Individual benefit.”²⁷

This action also antagonized Acting Judicial Assessor J. Clouston to whom Lilley explained: “Now with all possible deference to the opinion of yourself and Brother Magistrates this sentence appears to me to be not only a Singularly, but a most banefull (sic), one in its

²⁵ Lilley to Winniett, April 25, 1846, enclosed in Winniett to W&CO, May 7, 1846, CO 96/9, TNA.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Lilley to W&CO, February 6, 1846, CO 96/9, TNA.

consequence, if permitted to remain unaltered.” Lilley opined that the earlier verdict amounted to “compromising Felony.”²⁸ Clouston took offence at these comments. When the issue was brought to the attention of the War and Colonial Office, officials were at a loss as to how to intervene, but the sudden death of Lilley a few months later brought the matter to an unexpected end. Meanwhile, Clouston had also left the Gold Coast. A relieved official in the War and Colonial Office observed that: “[t]his, I presume, brings to a close the correspondence on a very strange and extravagant proceeding.”²⁹

“Your authority...shall be vindicated”: The administrations of Sir William Winniett

The subsequent two administrations of Governor William Winniett (April 15, 1846 to January 31, 1849; January 13, 1850 to December 4, 1850), throw light on the implications of personality, temperament, or idiosyncrasies of leaders for organizational coherence (Goleman 2000). Not only did Winniett enjoy harmonious relations with the resident English merchants, he even secured the cooperation of those who had been involved in open confrontations with previous governors. Shortly after assuming office, he wrote to the War and Colonial Office: “I do myself the honor to recommend to Your Lordship’s favorable consideration Mr Francis Swanzy of Dixcove and Mr Brodie Cruickshank of Annamaboe...who I should be pleased to see filling the Office of Civil Commandant of the Forts of the above named Place.”³⁰ He also appointed Powell, whom Lilley had wanted to place under arrest, as colonial surgeon. The War and Colonial Office was surprised by this appointment, but approved it nonetheless.³¹

²⁸ Lilley to J. Clouston, January 9, 1846, enclosed in Lilley to SW&C, February 6, 1846, CO 96/9, TNA.

²⁹ Minute by Mr Hawes, December 21, 1846, on Winniett to SW&C, October 12, 1846, CO 96/9, TNA.

³⁰ Winniett to SW&C, November 6, 1846, CO 96/9, TNA.

³¹ Minute by Mr Hawes, November 14, 1846, on Winniett to SW&C, August 13, 1846, CO 96/9, TNA.

Winniett even enjoyed good terms with Maclean. After quelling a potential insurrection in Tantom³², one of the leading coastal towns, Maclean wrote to him pledging to ensure the smooth running of the administration: “You may be assured that, come what will, your Authority and that of the Law shall be vindicated.”³³ And whereas earlier Gold Coast colonial administrators were reluctant to assist Lieutenant Governor Hill in the Rev. Hanson case, Winniett’s request for information from administrators was readily complied with.³⁴

The thawing of relationships between Winniett and the English residents did not mean the end of that the contestation between the British government and British mercantile interests over the future direction of the Gold Coast. Nor were the African mercantile elite passive in this struggle either. As can be seen above, two African merchants, Bannerman and Smith, had joined sides with the British mercantile interests on the coast; however, most of the influential Gold Coast traders, popularly known as the “Merchant Princes”, actively tried to get the British government ever more involved in the affairs of the Gold Coast. They realized that, in this, they were directly opposed to the interests of the English traders on the coast, who felt embittered over the imperial government’s assumption of more direct rule on the Gold Coast. In 1850 they organized a large party in honor of Winniett, and read a long letter to him, which among many other things, observed:

We have not forgotten the good old fable, “The Frogs desiring a King”. It has been questioned by some, whether the present form of Government here directly under the Queen, or that under the President and Council, guided by a body of Merchants is the best for this Colony. It appears to us only natural that a Child would be more cared for and better provided for by its natural Parents than by foster ones. And it is our unequivocal unanimously decided opinion than (sic) the existing form of Government that we now enjoy under the Queen is the best, and it is our wish that it remains unaltered. *It is our glory and happiness to acknowledge Her Government and Administration as our natural parents*

³² This town is currently known as Otuam

³³ Maclean to Winniett, October 26, 1846, enclosed in Winniett to SW&C, September 15, 1846, CO 96/9, TNA.

³⁴ Winniett to SW&C (enclosing Cruickshank’s correspondence), February 10, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

[author's emphasis], and we fervently pray, that no misdoings of our own, shall cause us to be disemboweled(?) or to be cast off to the care of others.³⁵

They went on to promise Winniett that he would “ever find in us a faithful and willing obedience to render your arduous tasks less difficult.”

In his response to this letter, Winniett referred to “certain statements which have been recently made in England” that had raised questions about the utility of the administration on the Gold Coast. Thanking them for “a testimony so unanimous” of the delight that they took in having been placed under the immediate governance of the British Crown, he assured them that their statement was going to be “a satisfactory proof both to Her Majesty’s Government in England, and to the Public generally...that the Local Government here is duly interested in the Welfare of Your County.” He promised the African merchants “ready access on all matters touching the interests of Your Country.”³⁶

A question of administrative control

The altered relationship with the English residents can be seen in the way Winniett related to Cruickshank and Swanzy, two of the leading English merchants on the Gold Coast. He gave these two traders very wide discretion in the administration. When Maclean died in May 1847, Winniett recommended Cruickshank for the post of judicial assessor “as I consider him the only person resident on the Coast fit to hold so important a Situation.”³⁷ Two months later when Cruickshank came down with an illness, Winniett appointed Swanzy in an acting capacity.³⁸ This

³⁵ Native Merchants of the Gold Coast to Winniett, August 14, 1850, enclosed in Winniett to W&CO, August 15, 1850, ADM 1/2/5, PRAAD, Accra.

³⁶ Winniett to Native Merchants of the Gold Coast, August 14, 1850, enclosed in Winniett to W&CO, August 15, 1850, PRAAD, Accra.

³⁷ Winniett to W&CO, May 24, 1847, CO 96/11, TNA.

³⁸ Winniett to W&CO, July 5, 1847, CO 96/11, TNA.

harmony, however, was purchased at the cost of surrendering considerable control of the administration to the leading English merchants. This became evident during the 1848 expedition against the king of Appolonia, which was not approved by the War and Colonial Office. In March Winniett informed the War and Colonial Office that he had raised an army composed of the militia and an ad hoc army with the intention of waging war on the Appolonian King.³⁹ The king of Appolonia deserved to be taught a lesson because he had given “considerable annoyance to the Local Government” by his continued “state of insubordination... [h]is disregard for, and contempt of the British Government” as well as “profanation of the British Flag to the prejudice of British Honour.”⁴⁰ More specific charges included accusations that he had detained messengers sent by colonial administrators, the murder of some French officers, and hindering trade by attacking traders travelling through his territory.⁴¹ The War and Colonial Office rejected these as legitimate grounds for military action. Secretary of State Earl Grey called it a “[great] and dangerous mistake,” and directed that a “dispatch severely censuring the Lt Gov” be addressed to Winniett.⁴²

Interestingly, the governor’s decision got support from unexpected quarters. Matthew Forster of the London firm Forster and Smith, and one of the government’s greatest foes, fully supported this expedition in a series of letters to the War and Colonial Office. He declared that the lieutenant governor should be commended, not reprimanded, for the initiative.⁴³ In an undated internal memo, London officials observed that “Mr Forster like all the other merchants has no objection to using the Govt to undertake warlike operations wherever it is fancied their own

³⁹ “It is highly gratifying to me, in the midst of much painful anxiety that I have not the least difficulty in raising the Force which I have mentioned; there is an eagerness on the part of both the Native Chiefs and their people to engage in this Expedition, which clearly shows that they are convinced that the cause in which they are embarking bears the encouraging stamp of righteousness.” Winniett to W&CO, March 23, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² A blistering letter was accordingly written to Winniett, and a copy sent to his wife in England. Minute by Lord Grey on letter from Winniett of, March 23, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

⁴³ Forster to W&CO, July 12, 1848, CO 96/14, TNA.

interests can be promoted by doing so.”⁴⁴ In fact, Winniett sailed to Appolonia on a vessel owned by Forster and Smith.⁴⁵

Contrary to Forster’s claims that Winniett had initiated the Appolonia expedition, the decision, in fact, came not from the governor but from longtime English residents and traders, most notably from Francis Swanzy. In September 1847 Swanzy, then acting judicial assessor, wrote to Winniett, claiming that the king of Appolonia was committing atrocities, stressing the “necessity of putting a stop to his brutality.”⁴⁶ Swanzy complained that earlier in the year, he had “despatched in your name” two messengers to inform the king of the governor’s intention to visit the British forts in Appolonia, and other friendly messages. The messengers never returned, and it was impossible to tell what had happened to them. This, as well as attacks on some French officers, led Swanzy to suggest to Winniett that the king’s cup was full and it was time he got punished:

Such conduct, such exceeding insolence, such thorough contempt of the British influence on the Coast is unparalleled, and I strongly urge upon Your Excellency the necessity of putting a stop to it—which is a matter after all of no great difficulty.

If no measures are taken to bring this Chief to his senses, a Chief living on the beach where there has been a British Fort,—I am sorry to inform Your Excellency that we must of necessity lose part of that consideration and respect combined with fear, with which the Chiefs and Natives of every part of the Coast both on the Waterside and in the Interior look upon us, – and I will not conceal from Your Excellency that already has this apparent apathy caused remarks to be made by the Natives and by Foreigners implying growing contempt of our power and influence.⁴⁷

Another letter from the Cape Coast trader Hutton provides further evidence that the decision to undertake the expedition against the king of Appolonia had come not from Winniett himself, but from the English traders who seemed to be directing the affairs of the administration via remote

⁴⁴ Minutes on dispatch from Winniett to W&CO, n.d., CO 96/13, TNA.

⁴⁵ W&CO to Winniett, July 3, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

⁴⁶ Swanzy to Winniett, September 6, 1847, CO 96/13, TNA.

⁴⁷ Swanzy to Winniett, September 6, 1847, CO 96/13, TNA.

control. Hutton told his correspondents in England that “[a]t a special Meeting Mr Cruickshank, F Swanzy and myself came to the resolution of urging this necessary step upon his Excellency.”⁴⁸

The military action itself was very successful. Apart from a brief initial skirmish, the Appolonians gave the king up after a brief half-hearted resistance. In reporting victory to the War and Colonial Office, Winniett praised the conduct of the expeditionary force and his two great former foes of the administration:

Mr Francis Swanzy and Mr Brodie Cruickshank the Gentlemen who conducted the Divisions of the Army, I beg to recommend to Your Lordship’s favorable consideration. The high respect in which they are held by the Natives of this Country, and their very great influence over them tended greatly to facilitate every important movement of the Army, and to produce those happy results which I have recorded. Their exertions were untiring and deserve all praise.⁴⁹

The expedition demonstrated that Winniett had an open door policy with regards to the established English residents and traders on the Gold Coast, the consequences of which would eventually haunt the administration. Ironically, it was Francis Swanzy, who had championed the expedition from the very beginning, who harried the administration over its eventual fallout toward the end of Winniett’s governorship. For most of his incumbency, however, Winniett enjoyed the confidence and assistance of the traders, so long as they were allowed to influence policy. Barely a month after the battle against the Appolonians, Winniett had cause again to recommend the service of Cruickshank to the War and Colonial Office: “I have on this, as well as upon all other occasions connected with the Expedition received the greatest assistance from Mr Cruickshank the late Acting Judicial Assessor who I am satisfied has the good of the Government and the welfare of the Colony at heart.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Thomas Hutton to W. M. Hutton, April 3, 1848, CO 96/14, TNA.

⁴⁹ Winniett to W&CO, May 24, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

⁵⁰ Winniett to W&CO, June 30, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

Winniett's expressions of gratitude and satisfaction were duly reciprocated by the British mercantile community on the Gold Coast. In July 1848 nine persons presented him with an address congratulating him on his success in Appolonia in ending the reign of a king they referred to as "a Cruel scourge to the Natives under his immediate command, as well as to those in his neighbourhood."⁵¹ They noted the victory restored "the honor of the British Flag" and opened the area to trade and commerce. The signatories included the African traders James Bannerman, his son Samuel Bannerman, and the Cape Coast merchant, William Hutchison, who were also officers of the administration. The address was forwarded to the governor by Cruickshank, who took the opportunity to heap further praises on Winniett:

No Person knows so well as I do how anxiously you have labored for the good of this Country, as my duties as Judicial Assessor constantly brought me into communication with you upon points connected with the improvement of the natives and of their system of Government.

I most sincerely join in the hope expressed in the address that your Excellency may receive that reward for your important Services, which they so richly merit. I embrace this opportunity of thanking you for your uniform attention to all suggestions made by me in my Official capacity, which your own judgement led you to believe to be for the Public advantage."⁵²

Cruickshank's remark that Winniett gave "uniform attention to all suggestions" is another indication of the ways in which the governors' attitude toward the English residents shaped the quality of relationships in the administration.

In London the War and Colonial Office, however, was unimpressed with these praises. One Mr. Elliot minuted that: "The Gov has been informed that he cannot be relieved from all responsibility on account of this Expedition until he has apprized Lord Grey of his further

⁵¹ The signatories to the address are J Bannerman, justice of the peace; F. Swanzy, justice of the peace and civil commandant of Dixcove; A. Swanzy, justice of the peace and civil commandant of Annamaboe; B. Cruickshank, justice of the peace; G Smith, justice of the peace and civil commandant of Accra; S. Bannerman, justice of the peace; T. B. Freeman; W. M. S.; Chas. Clouston, merchant; William. Hutchison, merchant. Address by merchants, magistrates, and residents of the Gold Coast to Winniett, July 10, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

⁵² Cruickshank to Winniett, July 10, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

proceedings in this serious affair.”⁵³ One conclusion emerges from these exchanges: the imperial government was more concerned with concrete solutions to the immediate problems of creating a conducive environment for the extension of their trade.

Their different understandings of the appropriate ways to project British authority contributed to the conflicts between the merchants and the government representatives. The problem was exacerbated because for fourteen years, the merchants successfully administered the forts after the British government abandoned them. Here, then, was a mercantile body, with financial interests in the affairs of the Gold Coast, as well as a self-conception as competent administrators, but who now saw their interests endangered by the transfer of control of the colony into the hands of government officers who lacked the competence and local knowledge required for its successful administration. This tension is most clearly borne out in the demands of the merchants for a legislative council.

The English merchants and residents agreed that the key problem facing the Gold Coast since the British government took over, was that newly appointed sent to administer the forts lacked the necessary knowledge and experience to deal with the local people. Even though the merchants had influence over the direction of affairs during the Winniett’s governorship, they wanted this access formalized in the structures of the administration. In February 1847 three members of the mercantile community, James Bannerman, Cruickshank, and J. Clouston penned suggestions for administrative reforms in a statement titled “Propositions for Improving the Government and Promoting the Prosperity of the British Settlements on the Gold Coast.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Minute by Mr. Elliot on Winniett’s dispatch, July 12, 1848, CO 96/13, TNA.

⁵⁴ “Propositions for Improving the Government and Promoting the Prosperity of the British Settlements on the Gold Coast,” by J. Bannerman, Cruickshank and J. Clouston, enclosed in dispatch, February 6, 1847, CO 96/12, TNA.

The premise of their proposal was that maintaining order and tranquility in the settlements necessitated an intimate understanding of the different coastal states who are “nearly equally matched in strength and jealous of each other.” If the administrator had this knowledge, it would not be “difficult for the local Government, by judiciously balancing contending parties, to turn the scales in favor of justice.” They noted that this has, in fact, been the policy which had been followed during the incumbency of the President and Council, a system, they claimed, which was “perfectly adapted” to the social conditions of the settlements. The evidence of the effectiveness of this policy, according to them, laid in the absence of fatal riots or disturbances, the gradual abolition of customs offensive to British sensibilities, as well as the wide dissemination of the broad principles of English justice; leading, they claimed, to “a spirit of happy contentment and attachment.” Under this state of affairs, commerce had increased and flourished. They lamented the altered state of affairs since the British government took direct control of the settlements:

Last year at Accra, at Winnebah and Yancommassie, disturbances occurred also in which several lives were lost and which interrupted for a time the trade of these places, such scenes has occasioned great uneasiness in the minds of those well acquainted with our relations with the Natives of the Gold Coast, as our power there has been principally that of opinion which cannot fail to be much shaken by these Conflicts persisted in in contempt of us. – *They were unknown under the former system when confidence and unanimity prevailed*, and they are now to be attributed to the comparative inutility of the Military force as at present composed [author’s emphasis].⁵⁵

The problem with the current composition of the military regiment, they argued, was that it failed to account for important aspects of social relations: “Most of the soldiers had originally belonged to a Tribe considered both by the Fantees and Ashantees so much inferior to themselves, that ‘Douguow’ the name given by them to these people was a term of reproach synonymous with Fool.” Consequently, the soldiers and the administration were unable to maintain order and tranquility.

⁵⁵ Bannerman, Cruickshank, and Clouston to Mr. Forster, February 12, 1847, CO 96/12, TNA.

This was one of the reasons that fueled their antagonism toward the new administration. The merchants asserted that without the requisite acquaintance with the people, and their customs and laws, no officer of the administration “will be able to act usefully, as decisions are guided not by English law but by the Law of Equity between Man and Man, adapted (as far as is consistent with Justice), to the peculiar customs of the People, and to the State of Society among them.” The solution to this quandary, they proposed, was the establishment of a council to advise and constrain the governor:

Under the very peculiar circumstances of our position on the Gold Coast, where an acquaintance with the character of the people is so essential to the Governor, it is evident that a perfect stranger will encounter many serious difficulties, which might be obviated by having recourse to the Council of those, whose standing in the Country entitled their opinions to weight. – The Governor may, it is true, enjoy the benefit of such men’s Experience, without the trammels of a Council, but opinions expressed by irresponsible Persons are not entitled to the same consideration as those of a deliberative body legitimately appointed. We consider it therefore a point of no mean importance that a Council should be constituted to assist the Governor with their advice, and with the power of controuling (sic), to a certain extent, his acts.⁵⁶

They were careful to stress that these observations by no means implied a lack of faith in the present Governor Winniett, admitting, in fact, that a “Gentleman more devoted to the interest of the Settlement, and more anxious to meet the views of the Settlers, and to increase prosperity of the natives does not, we believe, exist.” Their concern, they averred, was to guard against contingencies “such as happened under the Government of his predecessor, who made use of a most arbitrary and, we believe, unwarrantable exercise of authority in reference to the Commissions of Magistrates.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

“Intimate acquaintance” with the people: Struggles over administrative control

I have suggested above that the pattern of conflict and cooperation between merchants and British government representatives can be distilled into struggles over the control of the local administration. This is borne out by subsequent developments on the Gold Coast. The political struggles between the competing groups attained a more entrenched character. The British merchants sought to regain control of the administration, or at least a significant say in its policy direction. They had two objectives: 1) to establish an advisory council, and 2) to protect their mercantile interest.

These struggles occurred both on the Gold Coast and in England. In England, Forster and Smith kept pushing the agenda for an executive and legislative council to limit the powers of the governor, insisting on the necessity of such a council, and deploring the prevailing arrangement whereby the administration was now largely staffed “by persons sent out at random from the lottery of Government patronage, wholly ignorant of the Country and the Natives,” a system which he claimed was “destructive of the internal tranquility of the Gold Coast alone by which trade and commerce could be advanced.”⁵⁸

Forster perceived a deliberate campaign to thwart mercantile endeavors in West Africa. He complained that he had been engaged in mercantile activities in West Africa for over three decades, “throughout which period, I have labored incessantly to increase its exchangeable products, and extend its trade, [but] in place of being aided and assisted, I have invariably found myself obstructed and discouraged by the Colonial Authorities, both at home and on the Coast.” English merchants in Sierra Leone were equally critical of the War and Colonial Office, as shown by this excerpt from their letter which Forster quoted:

⁵⁸ Forster to W&CO, April 7, 1847, CO 96/12, TNA.

“I think our Colony is “progressing” as the Yankees phrase it, but I cannot trace this advancement to our friends in Downing Street. Indeed, I look upon the assistance we receive from home, whether in the shape of the annual parliamentary grant or the measures recommended from the War and Colonial Office, as the greatest hindrance to its progress.”⁵⁹

Forster could almost discern an official pattern of sabotage and obstruction designed against the merchants:

The Settlements on the Gold Coast were handed over to the Merchants in 1828 after being completely ruined and disorganized by Colonial Office misgovernance, under a threat that if the merchants did not take charge of them and uphold them on terms of £4000 a year, in place of from £30,000 to £40,000 a year, which the Colonial Office had expended in bringing them to the brink of ruin, they would be blown up and abandoned by the Crown. After being restored to prosperity by local self government, the Colonial Office again resumed charge of them in 1842, and again we find, their prosperity imperilled by the blighting influence of that department. It is true that no disasters have yet occurred so serious and disgraceful to the British name as those which marked the previous short period of Colonial misrule at the Forts, but despite the moral influence which yet remains to us from the fourteen years previous good Government, symptoms are not wanting sufficient to excite the most lively apprehensions on the part of those exposed to the misfortunes that may result from a recurrence of similar misfortunes.⁶⁰

From the Gold Coast, Francis Swanzy and Henry Smith also wrote to the War and Colonial Office to support the necessity of constituting a council to advise and check the powers of the governor, underscoring their intimate knowledge of the country and the customs of its inhabitants as “two of the Senior Magistrates and oldest residents on the Gold Coast.” Their intimate knowledge and long residence contrasted with the inexperience of the new War and Colonial Office appointees: “[a] Governor appointed to the Gold Coast is, as Your Lordship knows, generally unacquainted with the Country, its customs, laws, wants, trade, etc. which are all peculiar and different from those of any other Colony or Settlement, and which require particular management and policy.” Further, they warned of a possible “danger which might occur by the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

least imprudence or mismanagement of the Governor in bringing on a War at any time with the Ashantee.”⁶¹

The Secretary of State, Earl Grey, was himself contemplating administrative reforms when he received these proposals; however, when he asked for Winniett’s opinion, the governor was not very enthusiastic about the proposed council. He did “not see the advantage or necessity for it which Messrs Swanzy and Smith do.”⁶² On the basis of this statement, the War and Colonial Office informed Swanzy and Smith that “his Lordship does not consider that such a change in the existing system of government on the Gold Coast would be attended with advantage.”⁶³

Undeterred, Swanzy persisted in his campaign for reform. He sent another complaint to the War and Colonial Office, deploring the chaotic manner in which the judicial assessor’s office was run, the result of the absence of explicit laws regulating that office.⁶⁴ He found himself in a situation where “he may make his own laws, take his own view of things, right or wrong; and, differing in opinion from his predecessor, give different judgments in similar cases.” This state of affairs had occasioned “great anxiety...by all classes of people” because of their awareness “that the great and uncontrolled power which he possesses may be wielded, if judiciously and temperately, to the great benefit, but if otherwise, to the great injury of the Settns. [Settlements] and Country over which he is appointed to exercise vast judicial authority.” The appointment of James Fitzpatrick to the office of assessor brought the situation to a head.

⁶¹ Swanzy and H. Smith to W&CO, October 13, 1849, CO 96/17, TNA.

⁶² Winniett to W&CO, October 17, 1849, CO 96/15, TNA.

⁶³ W&CO to Swanzy and Smith, October 29, 1849, CO 96/15, TNA.

⁶⁴ The War and Colonial Office was fully aware of this situation. Indeed, when the assessor’s office was being created in 1843, an official in London noted enigmatically that the assessor was going to exercise justice rather than law.

Thus, the question of the Legislative Council was important. For Swanzy, the Legislative Council held the remedy for the potential “evil” effects of the new administrative arrangement, because even the governor needed reining in:

I beg your Lordship to consider how difficult, nay almost how impossible, it is for a Governor properly and beneficially to exercise this very extensive influence who is himself very imperfectly if at all acquainted with the situation, history, merits, & disposition of these different people; and therefore how necessary it is he should be advised by a council of men whose experience has been gained by long residence on the Coast.⁶⁵

Finally, Swanzy got a sympathetic audience in the War and Colonial Office. Earl Grey noted that “I am happy to have it in my power to inform him that after consulting the Gov & fully considering all the reasons which have been urged in favour of the measure I have determined upon advising H. M. to constitute a Legislative Council at Cape Coast Castle.”⁶⁶ The Legislative Council was duly constituted in April 1850. It was presided over by the Governor, William Winniett, and had four members: the judicial assessor, James Fitzpatrick; the collector of customs, Edward Staunton; and the civil commandants, James Bannerman and Brodie Cruickshank. Bannerman and Cruickshank sat on the council as representatives of the mercantile interests.⁶⁷

But the merchants were not satisfied with this concession and they agitated for increased representation on the Legislative Council continued. Months after the Legislative Council was instituted, Smith and Swanzy again expressed dissatisfaction with its composition. Under Maclean’s administration, “[n]o person could then become a Member of the Council until qualified by a residence of twelve months, and we remember no instance of any person having been elected who had not resided several years.” This system ensured that officials had “intimate acquaintance”

⁶⁵ Swanzy to W&CO, December 7, 1849, CO 96/17, TNA.

⁶⁶ Undated memo by Earl Grey on Swanzy to W&CO, December 7, 1849, CO 96/17, TNA.

⁶⁷ Winniett to W&CO, April 30, 1850, CO 96/18, TNA.

with the people and their habits and customs, an advantage which the current Legislative Council so glaringly lacked:

Our chief object in addressing your Lordship is respectfully to inform you that the Council, as at present constituted, cannot possibly give satisfaction to the inhabitants or answer the purpose for which it was doubtless created; and to solicit your Lordship's consent to permit the Council to be enlarged and improved so as to meet the wishes of all the parties on the Coast.⁶⁸

They claimed that if adequately represented on the council, the mercantile community could use their influence to assist the local government. For instance, on the subject of raising local revenue via increase in import duties, they maintained:

Much will depend on the view the principal English inhabitants take of the question. If they are permitted to have only one solitary representative in the Council and that one appointed by the Government, it can scarcely be expected they will facilitate the proposal. But should your Lordship grant them a more suitable form of Council, we think it likely that the inhabitants of the English Settlements will be induced to cooperate and that all opposition to a moderate and safe rate of duties may be removed.⁶⁹

They believed the present composition of the council was unacceptable. There were serious problems with giving the numerical majority on the council to government appointees, for in addition to being "ignorant of the trade and nature of the Country," these executive officers had only "few and faint sympathies with the people," and considered their service on the coast "as a stepping stone to a better appointment somewhere else." The inhabitants they administered did not respect them. Under these circumstances, the English merchants, by reason of long residence, were crucial in helping the government carry measures through; however, due to their limited representation on the Council:

...the cooperation and consent of the Merchants and people will not be obtained – It may be said that their consent is not absolutely necessary and that new measures of any kind may be carried into execution by the Governor without their cooperation and in spite of their objections – We fear however, that a very injurious feeling will arise and that the

⁶⁸ Smith and Swanzy to W&CO, August 16, 1850, CO 96/21, TNA.

⁶⁹ Ibid. The question of customs duty was a crucial one for the administration, because it was the chief means of raising local revenue after the failure of a scheme of direct taxation.

inhabitants will soon be still further impressed with the idea which to some extent already unfortunately exists that the objects of the local Government are merely personal, and that the interests of the Castle and of the residents in the towns are not identical —It will be much to be regretted if any such feeling is encouraged and any cause be given to the inhabitants to look upon the Castle with any hostile sentiments...

[W]e hope your Lordship will sanction the establishment of a Council containing not one, or two, but four members elected by the Merchants and respectable inhabitants, in addition to those selected by the Governor for your Lordship's approval.⁷⁰

The secretary of state dismissed this request, stating that he was not ready to make changes to the council. It was only on hindsight that the present arrangement of the council could be adequately evaluated: "The present body was constituted after much deliberation, and has been too short a time in the exercise of its functions to enable him to come at once to the conclusion that it has proved inadequate to the duties imposed on it. "The decision was, therefore, to leave the Council to naturally grow, and even were it to commit errors, they considered it to be inevitable."⁷¹

"Proclaiming himself judge, jury, and prosecutor": James Fitzpatrick

Although Governor Winniett had enjoyed harmonious relations with the English mercantile community for the duration of most of his administration, tensions still simmered underneath the apparent serenity. Hints of tensions emerged when Winniett declined Swanzy's repeated requests to have his salaries as civil commandant paid. Winniett had appointment a number of officers, Swanzy included, on condition that their salaries would only be paid if sufficient revenue was generated locally. While holding the post, Swanzy had been barred from carrying on trade. His requests came after months of working without pay. In response to these requests, Winniett responded:

I particularly pointed out to you, that is (sic) was most positively forbidden for any Trade to go on in the Fort. Upon that understanding you accepted office, and I regret that I cannot alter any recommendation on that subject to Earl Grey [the Secretary of State in London].

⁷⁰ Smith and Swanzy to W&CO, August 16, 1850, CO 96/21, TNA.

⁷¹ W&CO to Smith and Swanzy, December 10, 1850, CO 96/21, TNA.

I most certainly must disclaim making any promise to you as to the emoluments arising from the Office... How could I promise a certain Salary when it was not in my power to do so?⁷²

Shortly after this, “Mr Francis Swanzy at his pleasure removed to Cape Coast” from his station at Dixcove.⁷³ When Winniett was away in England on leave, Swanzy again applied for his salaries. James Fitzpatrick, then acting as governor, also declined the claim on the grounds that Winniett had “distinctly denied having promised any Salary.”⁷⁴ In addition to declining Swanzy’s application, Fitzpatrick also suggested to the War and Colonial Office that if an exception was to be made to the principle of not paying new appointees until revenue has been raised, “Mr Swanzy is not the best entitled,” but rather James Bannerman, who had put his own house at the service of the administration to be used as a court and a jailhouse, without receiving rent or salary.⁷⁵

This marked the beginning of a series of conflicts that Fitzpatrick got embroiled in with individual merchants, and subsequently, with the entire Gold Coast mercantile community. Fitzpatrick came into full collision with the merchants in 1849 during the period when he was acting governor. These conflicts turned on the altered nature of administrative policy since the British government resumed direct control.

In September 1849, Mr. Sandeman, a merchant “of ten years residence on the Coast,” brought a charge of unlawful termination of contract against Fitzpatrick.⁷⁶ Sandeman also condemned the deplorable state of the administration, blaming it on the inadequate structures that had been in place since the British government took over direct control:

I beg to draw Your Lordship’s attention to the fact, that had there been a Council here, instead of this absolute and despotic power being vested in one person, such things could not have occurred.

⁷² Winniett to Swanzy, 10th July 1848; enclosed in Fitzpatrick’s letter to the CO, 20th June, 1849, CO 96/15, TNA.

⁷³ Winniett to the W&CO, November 10, 1849, CO 96/15, TNA.

⁷⁴ Fitzpatrick to the W&CO, June 20, 1849, CO 96/15, TNA.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Sandeman to W&CO, September 30, 1849, CO 96/17, TNA.

It is surely a very hard case as well as Unconstitutional, that a man who risks his all, life, health and property, in such a place as this should neither have a vote in the making of bye laws & regulations, nor get in Magisterial appointment, the abuses in both departments having been carried to an extent amounting to ridicule.⁷⁷

Officials in London expressed discomfort with the imperious acts of the Fitzpatrick.⁷⁸ They transmitted the case file to Winniett for comments. Winniett defended Fitzpatrick personally, but blamed the problem on the anomaly of the official position that circumstances had forced upon him. Fitzpatrick had not abused his power, acted indiscreetly, nor neglected his duties; the problem had been caused by the fusion of the judicial and executive positions he occupied as judicial assessor and acting governor: “it is therefore of that arrangement, and not of Mr Fitzpatrick personally, that I have more particularly to speak.”⁷⁹ The fusion of executive and judicial authority in one person had given rise to “sundry evils”:

...during my recent absence from my Government, the consequences of which evils are still painfully felt here, in the existence of much bad feeling exhibited on the part of the Residents and Natives towards Mr. Fitzpatrick, render it, however painful and disagreeable to me to have to do so, an imperative duty on my part to Her Majesty’s Government, to call Your Lordship’s attention to the question involved.⁸⁰

Disaffection against James Fitzpatrick was quite widespread. Winniett suggested, rather vaguely, that this dissatisfaction with Fitzpatrick was evident among officials in the Police Station attached to the judicial assessor’s office and grew during the time he acted as governor. As an antidote to a repetition of this scenario, Winniett recommended that the system whereby the acting governorship automatically devolved unto the judicial assessor be altered, suggesting instead that

⁷⁷ Ibid. Responding to the charges, Fitzpatrick accused Sandeman of disorderliness and disturbance of the peace. He also listed Sandeman as one of the obstinate foes of the government: “I should mention to Your Lordship that Mr Sandeman since the transfer of the Forts to the Crown in 1843 has pertinaciously (sic) endeavored to obstruct the Government and bring the Authorities into disrepute with the Native population though few Men derive more advantage from them. Even since the hearing of this case I have recovered debts for him to a considerable amount, from Natives in the interior and paid them over to him.” Fitzpatrick to the W&CO, October 22, 1849, CO 96/16, TNA.

⁷⁸ Minute by Merivale on Sandeman’s letter to the W&CO, November 30, 1849, CO 96/17, TNA.

⁷⁹ Winniett to the W&CO, May 30, 1850, CO 96/18, TNA.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

the governor be given the discretion to appoint an appropriate acting officer. This proposal was accepted and the secretary of state informed Winniett that a commission had been issued under the Royal Sign Manual appointing James Bannerman, the African merchant, as lieutenant governor in the death or absence of the Governor.⁸¹

In the meantime, accusations of Fitzpatrick's administrative excesses kept pouring in. Clouston, another member of the British mercantile community on the Gold Coast, directly contradicted Winniett's defense of Fitzpatrick by alleging that Fitzpatrick had *personally* abused the power that he wielded as both governor and judicial assessor:

As Judicial Assessor Mr Fitzpatrick acted as discreetly as could have been expected &c. But no sooner was he installed in the post of Acting Governor than he appears to have thrown off all restraint. In that exercise of his temporary authority he has strained it to the extent of illegality, asserting Judicial Cognizance and power over Europeans. —in one instance proclaiming himself Judge, Jury, and Prosecutor and acting in that anomalous capacity.⁸²

Clouston further accused Fitzpatrick of exercising powers which he did not have in relation to the African population. Andrew Swanzy, brother of Francis Swanzy, corroborated this charge, referring to Fitzpatrick's attempt to suppress a "native custom" in Cape Coast: "I myself saw a Proclamation which was sent to Mr Cruickshank for publication at Annamaboe," but he claimed that Cruickshank had refused to publish the proclamation "on account of the illegality & rashness of such a measure."⁸³

Forster, the London merchant, protested that this state of affairs was unacceptable, because it put the English traders and residents in a vulnerable position. This was compounded by the fact that the English "residents have no constitutional means of resolving their grievances and wants" on the coast:

⁸¹ W&CO to Winniett, August 10, 1850, CO 96/18, TNA.

⁸² J. Clouston, cited in J. Fitzpatrick to W. Winniett, August 13, 1850, CO 96/19, TNA.

⁸³ A. Swanzy to Forster, enclosed in letter from Forster to W&CO, December 31, 1850, CO 96/21, TNA.

...nor has Lord Grey, as it appears to me, any other means of information than the *ex parte* statements of his own officers whereby to learn the true state of affairs except by hearing the other side in this manner; nor has his Lordship, as far as I can see under such a system of Government, any other means of keeping his officers in check or teaching them their duty than by calling upon them to explain and justify their conduct in answer to such complaints.⁸⁴

He refrained from voicing opinions on the substance of these charges, “until Mr Fitzpatrick is heard in his own defence.” But that did not stop him from making known his opinion of Clouston’s character: “But this I may say, that I have the implicit confidence in Mr Clouston’s truthfulness and moderation that I do not believe that he would wilfully make an unfounded or unnecessary complaint.”⁸⁵ On Fitzpatrick, he noted that maintaining order on the coast required an officer who was “respected by the natives,” but he was certain that “Mr Fitzpatrick was not such a person.”⁸⁶

Winniett discerned “the existence, in all probability, of a prejudice, as a Mercantile man, in favor of a more mercantile form of Government.”⁸⁷ Against the claims that the administration of the merchants was superior, he responded: “Before this can be fully answered, Mr Clouston must point out more distinctly, what were the administrative advantages of the old Regime.” Winniett admitted that Maclean was well acquainted with the manners and customs of the people, and that “[o]n many points he doubtless Governed well, and consequently brought out good results.” But he insisted that this was not a testament to the administrative superiority of the system that Maclean operated, but rather facts that “are honorable to the man whose genius, on many occasions, triumphed over a bad system, and whose sound judgement enabled him so often to steer (sic) a safe course under difficult circumstances.” In fact, he noted that Maclean “acted almost entirely in all things, on his own responsibility.”

⁸⁴ Forster to CO, May 20, 1850, CO 96/21, TNA.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ A. Swanzy to Forster, enclosed in letter from Forster to W&CO, December 31, 1850, CO 96/21, TNA.

⁸⁷ Winniett to W&CO, August 21, 1850, CO 96/19, TNA.

Conclusion

Taken as a predictable aspect of all interpersonal relations, these conflicts were not remarkable. Indeed, organizational conflicts are ubiquitous. But what makes these particular internecine conflicts theoretically noteworthy is the fact that they undermined the coherence of the colonial administration. And by undermining the administration, they opened up gaps for colonized actors to insert themselves into the political processes leading to the formation of the colonial state. Most of the quarrels were of a deeply personal or highly particular nature; however, underlying the personal acrimonies were deep struggles over control of the administration. Furthermore, these conflicts generated a pattern of animus that foreclosed unity of action over some crucial policy questions. The lack of unity of action became a part of the political opportunity structure within which colonized actors pursued certain lines of action. In short, these tensions produced fractures in the administrations in which colonized actors could (and did) insert themselves.

The complex nature of conflicts and interactions in nineteenth century Gold Coast demonstrates that it is misleading to take for granted the broad categories of colonizer versus colonized in any analytic framework. These descriptive labels gloss over rich textured relationships that defy simple categorization. A better analytical approach is to assess the politics of particular colonial policies by parsing out the complex relations of conflict and cooperation which enabled them. This paper has argued that the Gold Coast colonial administration in the nineteenth century was torn by policy and administrative incoherence arising from internecine organizational squabbles. The educated Gold Coast merchants operated together with Europeans in the emerging modern sphere of administration and commerce on the Gold Coast. The network of ties during this period meant that members of the Gold Coast elite were able to take advantage of these rifts among the British colonial administrators to shape the formulation and

implementation of policy, and their address to Governor Winniett expressing their preference for the direct administration of the British government is an example.

Part of the reasons why the history of the Gold Coast defies a coherent telling are the indecisiveness and hesitations which marked some of the most important episodes in the colony's history. Underlying this was the fact that official policy remained inconstant throughout the nineteenth century. For instance, by 1850, control of the Gold Coast had already boomeranged between the British government and English traders twice; and as late as 1865, a select committee of the British parliament recommended a withdrawal from the coast. Individual governors rarely stayed on the coast for up to five years. This, in addition to the fact that governors often came with their own temperaments and leadership styles, meant that administrative policies and practices were unstable. It often happened that one governor labored long and hard to build up a harmonious relationships or effective administrative structure, only for his successor to dismantle it immediately upon taking office. In the history of the Gold Coast, therefore, as in the history of contemporary polities, leadership matters (Ahlquist and Levi 2011).

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