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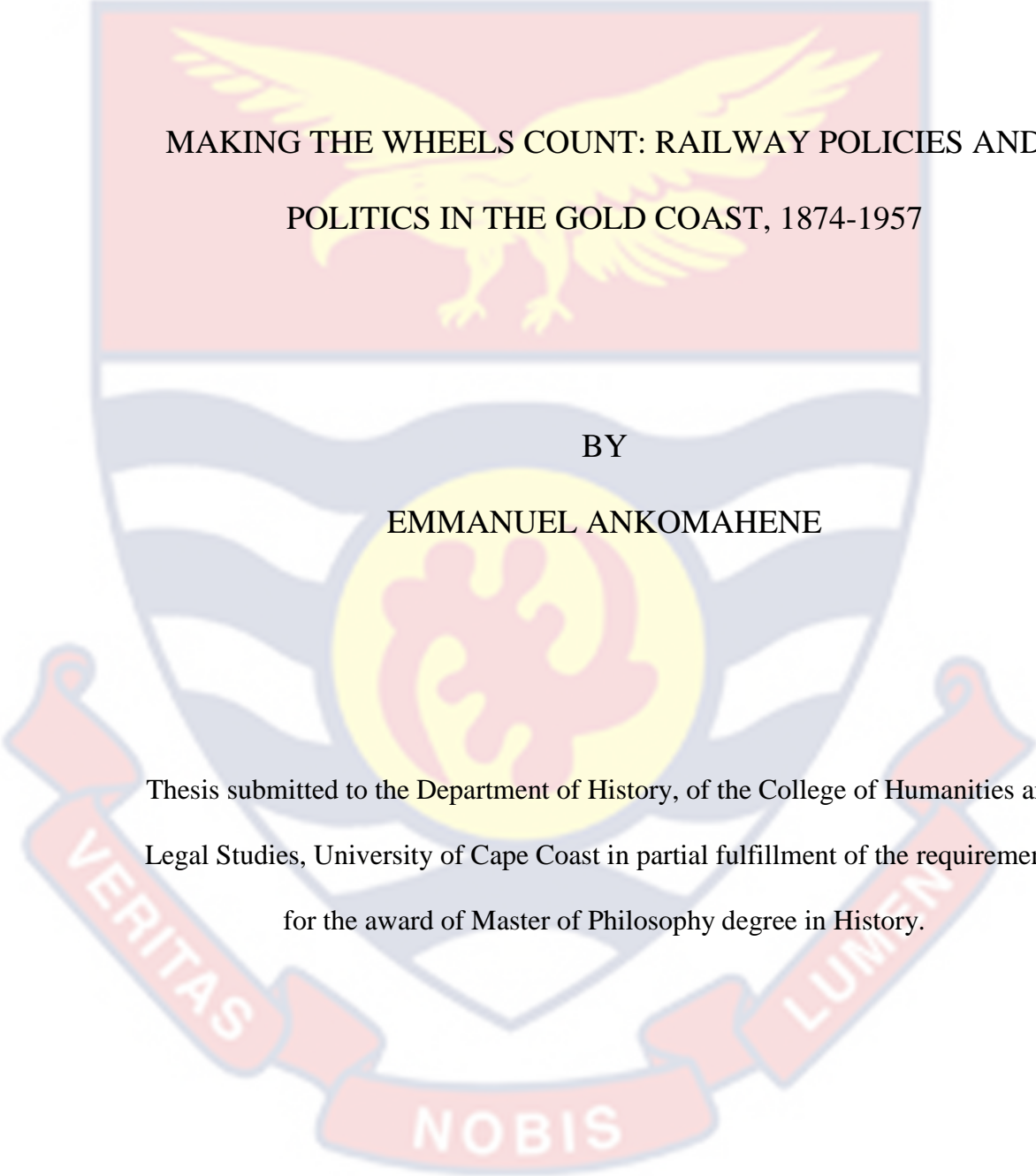


**MAKING THE WHEELS COUNT: RAILWAY POLICIES AND
POLITICS IN THE GOLD COAST, 1874-1957**

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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST



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POLITICS IN THE GOLD COAST, 1874-1957

BY

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Thesis submitted to the Department of History, of the College of Humanities and
Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of Master of Philosophy degree in History.

APRIL 2023

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that, except for the quotations and references which have been duly acknowledged, this work is the record of my own research, and it has never been submitted in part or whole for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:..... Date.....

Name: Emmanuel Ankomahene

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature:..... Date:.....

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ABSTRACT

The development of railways played a significant role in the British colonial enterprise in the Gold Coast. Even though railways were an efficient infrastructure meant to address transportation issues in the last decade of the nineteenth century, they were also central to the economic development of the colony in the twentieth century. The development of railways did not only occasion internal and external trade, economic growth and development, and the exploitation of resources but also contributed immensely to colonial politics in the Gold Coast during this period. The construction of railways was a way of entrenching colonial rule and to further control administration in the Gold Coast. In this regard, this thesis employs relevant primary and secondary sources to examine how the construction of railways impacted the politics of the Gold Coast between 1874 and 1957. The study argues that railway policies and construction were very impactful on the establishment and consolidation of British colonial power in the Gold Coast. It helped to entrench and consolidate the government's control over the interior of the colony. Whereas the railways initially helped to consolidate colonial rule, they later became an instrument of decolonisation after the Second World War. The thesis shows that railways were crucial to the nationalist political movements in the Gold Coast and went a long way to expedite the independence struggle of the country. The study provides significant insights into the dynamics of colonialism in the Gold Coast.

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DEDICATION

To my brother: Eric Ankomahene



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The area in West Africa that became known as the Gold Coast Colony came under British rule in 1874 through the so-called ‘treaties of protection’.¹ This area, geographically, is what presently constitutes the southern coastal parts of the Republic of Ghana. Even though some contending schools of thought argue that the signing of the Bond of 1844 ushered in the official colonisation of the Gold Coast, it is obvious that the country officially fell into the hands of the British in 1874.² An Annual Departmental Report of the Gold Coast clearly stated when the Gold Coast was officially colonised by the British. The report explained that “a new Charter was issued dated the 24th July 1874, separating Her Majesty's settlements on the Gold Coast and Lagos from the Government of Sierra Leone and constituting them into one colony under a Governor-in-Chief with an Administrator at Lagos.”³ After the colonisation of the Gold Coast, European nations met in Berlin between 1884 and 1885 to agree on how to partition Africa so that they could engage in their imperial activities without creating conflicts and bloodshed among themselves.⁴

¹ K. Tsey, *From Head-loading to the Iron Horse Railway Building in Colonial Ghana and the Origins of Tropical Development* (Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2013), xii. After Asante had been annexed to the Gold Coast in the early 1900s, British rule expanded to encompass the Northern Territories mainly through a series of treaties.

² The Bond of 1844 was a peace agreement signed by Commander Hill and eight Fante chiefs from Assin, Denkyira, Abora, Anumabo, and Cape Coast.

³ Public Records and Archives Administration Department (Henceforth PRAAD), Accra, ADM 5/1/30, Annual Departmental Reports of the Gold Coast, 1934-35, 3.

⁴ J. S. Keltie, *The Partition of Africa* (London: E. Stanford, 1893); J. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1955); V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Imperialism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983); W. Rodney, *How Europe*

Colonialism which began due to the emergence of the Industrial Revolution was primarily for the extraction of African resources. The Industrial Revolution brought in a new process of production to replace the earlier slave-based economy, that depended on the labour of enslaved Africans supplied by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The desire to invest the accumulated capital from the Industrial Revolution and the need for raw materials to supply European industries were some of the motivations for the European colonisation of Africa.⁵ Earlier in their contact, the Europeans realised it was impossible to transport the needed raw materials without an efficient colonial domination. The construction and development of railways became the optimal means of assisting the British authorities to penetrate the interior of the Gold Coast to extract and transport raw materials.⁶ During this period, railways had become one of the most important factors of industrial expansion in England.⁷ Mark Casson indicates that although the construction and operation of railways in England had setbacks in its maiden years from 1825, it later became an efficient response to the traffic requirements of the economy, for instance in Victoria. He further proves that in the age of imperialism, the railway system was an innovation that was exported from Britain to other colonial empires. This explains why the British constructed and operated

Underdeveloped Africa (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972), all cited in A. A. Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 27. See also C. G. Contee, "Current Problems of African Historiography," *Negro History Bulletin* 30, no. 4, 1967, 5-10; Tsey, *From Head-loading to the Iron Horse Railway Building*, xii.

⁵ S. Ocheni, and B. C. Nwankwo, "Analysis of Colonialism and Its Impact in Africa". *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 8 (3), 2012, 46. Available from URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/cc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020120803.1189>

⁶ D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana, 1850-192* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 25 & 26.

⁷ A. G. Hopkins. *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 192.

railways in the Gold Coast.⁸ Olufemi Omosini draws attention to how railways were crucial to the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. He mentions that railway builders covered the whole of Western Europe with a network that importantly enhanced the progress of the Industrial Revolution.⁹

Studies on the Gold Coast point to the efforts made by the British government to build and develop railways in the Gold Coast. In 1873, the first quixotic railway project in the Gold Coast shipped materials for a light tramway from Cape Coast to the River Prah, but the project was unsuccessful.¹⁰ Joseph Chamberlain who had been appointed as the Secretary of State for British colonies then recommended that for the benefit of the economy, colonial railways should be carried out by the government, and not private enterprise. The developmental period for railway policy was between 1893 and 1895.¹¹ David Kimble mentions that the construction of a 3-foot 6-inch gauge, single-line track began in Sekondi in 1898, and reached Tarkwa in 1901. This considerably lowered the cost of gold production and influenced the mining boom. An Ashanti Railway Ordinance was passed in 1902, and as a result, the line had been

⁸ M. Casson. *The World's First Railway System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1, 56 & 57.

⁹ These railways played a major part in the development of these continents. See O. Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude towards the Development of West Africa, 1872-1903." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5, No. 4, June 1971, 491 & 492.

¹⁰ "Afterwards the Colonial Office could think of no alternative use for the rolling-stock. Fitzgerald of *The African Times* was, of course, not lacking in enthusiasm; in 1879 he announced the formation of the West African Railroad, Tramways and Canal Company, whose paper projects included railways from the River Ankobra to the Wassaw goldfields, and from Elmina to Accra, not to mention a canal from there to the Volta. But the shareholders were not forthcoming, and a few months later he was complaining bitterly of African apathy. With the revival of trade in the early 1880's, further amateur railway proposals were mooted, including one by Africanus Horton, but again nothing came of these." See Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 26-31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26-31.

extended through the forest and timber areas of Obuasi by the end of that year. Kumasi enthusiastically welcomed the first train in December 1903. The railways also began in Accra in 1909 and were extended to cocoa areas of the Eastern Province.¹² To serve the gold mines, a branch railway was constructed from Tarkwa to Prestea.¹³ Although the development of railways began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, burgeoning strides were made to transform the railway system in the twentieth century, mainly in the first decades of the century and during Guggisberg's administration.¹⁴

The Eastern Province railway was completed by the Guggisberg administration in 1923 and that of the Central Province was also completed in 1927.¹⁵ These were meant to serve the rich cocoa and timber areas as well as the diamond-mining industry at Akwatia, Takorase and Kade in the Eastern Province. The quest to provide bauxite and iron ore during World War II led to the construction of another branch line from Dunkwa to Awaso in the Sefwi district. Another railroad was completed at Achimota station on the Accra-Kumase line to

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27 & 28. Tarkwa and Prestea were notable mining towns located in the Western Province of the Gold Coast. For efficient administration, the British Authorities during this period had divided the Gold Coast into three provinces namely: the Eastern, Western and Central Province with Dodowa as the Capital of the Eastern Province.

¹⁴ "Guggisberg is credited with accelerating the process of Africanization of the civil service, introducing a liberal constitution, building Achimota School and Takoradi Harbour, increasing the length of the railway and motorable roads in the country." See also, N. J. K. Brukum, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg and Socio-Economic Development of Northern Ghana, 1919-1927." *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No. 9, 2005, 1. Boahen and Agbodeka also see him as the greatest governor that Ghana ever had and a "colonial official pure and simple" respectively, see A. A. Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Accra: Sankofa, 2000), 117; F. Agbodeka, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg's Contribution to the Development of the Gold Coast, 1919-27" in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana (THSG)*, Vol. XIII (1), June 1972, 5, cited in Brukum, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg", 1.

¹⁵ Kumasi was the capital of the Asante Territory. After the British officials had occupied the territory, it was imperative for them to extend the railway to the area for effective colonial occupation.

the new seaport of Tema in 1955. This line was constructed to aid in the provision of construction materials during the building of the Tema seaport. The Gold Coast Chronicle in its report in 1893 justified the importance of railways. It reports that a few rail lines in the interior would be more beneficial than roads that cost a huge sum of money to maintain.¹⁶

Literature on railways in Africa highlight how railways played an important role in the extraction and exploitation of African resources. In the Gold Coast, these resources included rubber, timber, minerals, and cocoa. Annually, the Gold Coast's cocoa export increased slowly to 13 tons in 1895 and by 1905, it had leapt to more than 5,000 tons. The Gold Coast was the world's leading producer of cocoa, producing nearly 40,000 tons in 1911. World production and consumption doubled in the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1920, the Gold Coast produced one-third of the world's production of cocoa: more than any other country in the world.¹⁷ The exportation of rubber accounted for 31% of the export products of the Gold Coast in 1891. By 1891, over a million cubic feet of timber valued at £22,000 was being exported and this increased to over six million valued at £55,000 in 1901.¹⁸ By 1895, over 3000 concessions had been taken in Obuasi gold mines. Between 1901 and 1911, 280, 000 ounces of gold were produced, and the Gold Coast was earning about £ 1 million from gold. Manganese and diamonds were also exported and by 1923, they made a

¹⁶ *The Gold Coast Chronicle*, 18 Feb. 1893, cited in Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* However, whereas many other growing countries were dependent on European capital and management, the Gold Coast outstripped them all with a spontaneous diffusion of enterprise among African farmers. This was justifiably described before the West African Lands Committee as a unique example of indigenous industry.

¹⁸ Boahen, *Evolution and Change*, 51.

significant impact on exports from the Gold Coast. Output of manganese also steadily rose from 139,595 tons in 1923 to 419,224 tons in 1929.¹⁹

The role railways played in the exploitation of resources of the Gold Coast by the British has been examined by several scholars like Olufemi Omosini, Christian Tsey, N. J. K. Brukum, Remi Jedwab, Edward Kerby, and Alexander Moradi.²⁰ However, it is interesting to note that railway development also enhanced economic growth. It is argued that although the main purpose of the construction of railways was to enhance the transportation of colonial resources from the hinterland to the seaport for export, it culminated in urban development in places where railways were constructed.²¹ This was very common in colonies in Africa. Olufemi Omosini contends that railways were vital to the economic revolution in West Africa and whose effects could still be seen today. Railways have been one of the highest impacts of innovation in transport brought into West Africa from Europe.²² Remi Jedwab, Edward Kerby, and Alexander Moradi maintain that colonial railroads have had a long-term impact on urban and development patterns in Kenya since the colonial period. Their investigations

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁰ O. Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude towards the Development of West Africa, 1872-1903." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5, No. 4, June 1971, 507; C. E. Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways: the Making of a Colonial Economy, 1879-1929." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1986), 289; R. Jedwab, E. Kerby, and A. Moradi, "History, Path Dependence and Development: Evidence from Colonial Railroads, Settlers and Cities in Kenya." *Centre for the Study of African Economies*, 2014, 2 & 3; Brukum, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg and Socio-Economic Development of Northern Ghana, 1919-1927." 1.

²¹ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 33.

²² Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude towards the Development of West Africa." 507.

show that the railroad had strong, and unexpected effects on European settlement, thereby creating cities from where they managed their activities.²³

As far as the Gold Coast is concerned, David Kimble had argued that both mining and railways brought about a substantial inflow of capital, and encouraged a widespread increase in imports, which rose by about £1 million annually between 1898 and 1902. Indirectly, the mining boom had an important influence on the supplementary services needed for economic expansion.²⁴ Remi Jedwab and Alexander Moradi also argue that railways unintendedly created large areas of tropical forest for cocoa cultivation, which allowed Ghana to become the world's largest producer. The situation attracted migrants to producing areas and the economic surplus drove urbanisation.²⁵ Generally, three views have emerged on the effects of railways. First, McPhee claims that railways encouraged both internal and external trade, but more especially the cocoa industry. Second, Howard maintains that the effects of railways on internal trade were little and were basically influential in enhancing import-export trade. Third was J. B. Kay's contention that railways mainly served the expatriate mining sector.²⁶

The development of railways did not only occasion internal and external trade, economic growth and development, and the exploitation of colonial

²³ R. Jedwab, E. Kerby, and A. Moradi, "History, Path Dependence and Development: Evidence from Colonial Railroads, Settlers and Cities in Kenya." *Centre for the Study of African Economies*, 2014, 2 & 3. See the following works on railways: L. A. Lindsay, "No Need... to Think of Home? Masculinity and Domestic Life on the Nigerian Railway, c.1940-61." *The Journal of African History* 39, No. 3, 1998, 442. Lindsay also cites W. Oyemakinde, "Railway Construction and Operation in Nigeria, 1895-1911: Labour Problems and Socio-Economic Impact." *J. Hist. Soc. Nigeria*, vii, 1974, 303-24; A. L. Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria* (London: University of London Press, 1968).

²⁴ Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 30.

²⁵ R. Jedwab and A. Moradi, "Transportation Infrastructure and Development in Ghana." *Paris-Jordan Sciences Economiques*, 2011, 1.

²⁶ Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways: the Making of a Colonial Economy, 1879-1929." 289.

resources but also contributed immensely to colonial politics in the Gold Coast. Andrew Daniel Bruckner has argued that the construction of railways helped in creating informal empires around the world and also control administration.²⁷ In the case of the Gold Coast, the construction and development of railways were very essential in consolidating and strengthening colonial rule. For example, the location of railways connected various districts, provinces, and territories together and helped to unify and link large areas of the colony, placing them under a firm British colonial control for easy administration. However, while railways were used to consolidate and expand colonial power, they became an instrument of decolonisation after the Second World War. Railway was crucial to the nationalist political movements in the Gold Coast and that accelerated the independence struggle of the country.

Statement of the Problem

The development of colonial railways contributed significantly to the colonial political economy of the Gold Coast, yet existing literature on the Gold Coast railway industry has often focused on the economic impact of railways, particularly how railways have led to economic growth and development and the exploitation of natural resources of the colony. These works include R. Jedwab and A. Moradi' "Transportation Infrastructure and Development in Ghana", and

²⁷ A. D. Bruckner, "To Develop the Colonial Estate: The Reasons for British West African Railways." (MA Research, The University of York, 2011), 23.

Komla Tsey's *from Head-loading to the Iron Horse Railway Building in Colonial Ghana and the Origins of Tropical Development*.²⁸

Works that dealt with railways' contribution to politics in the Gold Coast are works that explored the building of railways, recruitment of labour and how railway workers negotiated for good working conditions and eventually contributed to the decolonisation of the Gold Coast. These works include Leslie Lacy's "A History of Railway Unionism in Ghana"; Richard Jeffries' "the Labour Aristocracy", and *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: the Railwaymen of Sekondi*; and Chada Zinyama's "Labour Protest, Group Consciousness and Trade Unionism in West Africa: *the Radical Railway Workers of Colonial Ghana, 1900-1950*."²⁹ In as much as railways were means by which the colonialists exploited the resources of the Gold Coast and served as a tool for railway workers to contribute to colonial politics, they also helped to firmly entrench colonial rule. The significant contribution of railways to the colonial economy of the Gold Coast makes it imperative to explore how they also helped in consolidating colonial rule. The above literature did not look at this. The research gap justifies why this current study examined how railway development helped in strengthening colonial rule in the Gold Coast.

²⁸ Jedwab and Moradi, "Transportation Infrastructure and Development in Ghana." 1; Tsey, *From Head-loading to the Iron Horse Railway Building in Colonial Ghana and the Origins of Tropical Development*, xii.

²⁹ L. A. Lacy, "A History of Railway Unionism in Ghana." (M. A. Thesis, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1965), 47; R. D. Jeffries, "The Labour Aristocracy? Ghana Case Study." *Review of African Political Economy* 3, May - Oct., 1975, 65-69. See also, R. D. Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2, 244; Chada, G. T. Zinyama, "Labour Protest, Group Consciousness and Trade Unionism in West Africa: the Radical Railway Workers of Colonial Ghana, 1900-1950." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1981), 45.

The scanty literature on the political impact of railways provides the need for extensive research into railways' interactions with other patterns of politics in colonial Ghana. The contribution of railways to politics gives insight into how the colonial administration penetrated the hinterland and unified these areas under strong British control. In view of this, the study explored the development of railways and their interactions with colonial politics in the Gold Coast between 1874 and 1957. The term 'politics' used in this study looks at how the construction and development of railways aided the British colonial government to establish firm colonial power in the Gold Coast, and how railway workers helped in the decolonisation process. The study argued that whilst railways helped in the establishment of colonial rule, they also contributed to decolonisation after 1945. In this regard, the study explored the contradictory role that railways played in the colonial endeavour of the Gold Coast.

By focusing on these themes, the study also offered significant insights into the nexus between political and economic predispositions of railway development in the Gold Coast. These went a long way to provide an understanding of the contributions of railways to colonial expansion and consolidation for the economic and political objectives of colonialism to be realized. Since the study focuses on colonial railways, it began from 1874, when the Gold Coast was officially colonised by the British and when strides were made to construct railways in the country. The 1870s also marks the antecedents of railway construction in the Gold Coast. The study ended in 1957 when colonialism ended, and Ghana officially became independent.

Research Objectives

The study aimed at examining railway policy decisions and outcomes and their impact on colonialism in the Gold Coast. The study specifically:

1. Explores railway plans, policies, and outcomes of the British colonial government in the Gold Coast.
2. Examines railways as a tool to consolidate colonial rule in the Gold Coast.
3. Analyses railway's contribution to the nationalist political movements in the Gold Coast in the 1940s and 1950s.

Literature Review

Literature for this study has been reviewed thematically. This was done to help identify and highlight the viewpoints of the authors of the existing works to better situate the study. The literature has also been put in sub-titles to present the existing works thematically.

Colonialism in Africa

Scholarly texts on colonialism in Africa describe the nature and the extent of colonial exploitation of the resources of Africa by European imperialists. A critical analysis of this literature demonstrates how colonialism stimulated exploitation.³⁰ For instance, Walter Rodney provides insight into how colonialism led to the underdevelopment of Africa and the development of Europe through a dialectical process.³¹ Rodney states that the way Africa was exploited made the

³⁰ See the following literature on colonialism: Boahen, *African Perspectives*; J. D. Settles, "The Impact of Colonialism on African Economic Development." *University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects*, 1996.

³¹ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 33

people to contribute enormously to Europe's development.³² In building infrastructure for the political economy, the Europeans used Africans for their own benefit. More importantly for this study, Rodney again mentions that African labour was recruited in the mining, railway, and agricultural areas among others. European firms, banks, insurance, and shipping lines amassed huge profits on African soil as against the African peasants.³³

Different scholars have explained the reasons and nature of colonialism in Africa. Albert Adu Boahen in his work *Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880–1935*, maintained that the main reason for the colonisation of Africa by European powers was to brutally exploit the resources of Africa for their own benefit and that of their mercantile, mining, and financial companies.³⁴ According to him, this system replaced the erstwhile slave trade which was abolished in the early decades of the 1800s.³⁵ However, Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage had different perspectives on colonialism in Africa. They claimed that colonialism sought to maintain peace and the rule of law and to fulfil the colonial government's increasing sense of 'moral obligation' to develop African societies.³⁶ Regardless of the different perspectives on colonialism, Boahen, Oliver and Fage agreed on how colonial states worked. First, they claimed that in the colonisation of Africa, Europeans were colonisers and that Africans were colonized, making the dissimilarities between them clear. Second, they assumed, that colonial states

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ A. Adu Boahen, ed., *General History of Africa, viii. Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880–1935* (Paris: UNESCO, 1990), 7.

³⁵ Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, 1987), 3-8.

³⁶ Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa*, 6th edn (London: Penguin, 1990), 184, 197.

formulated and applied policies with a high level of consistency that made the theory and practice of rule connect.³⁷ These works paved the way for the study to delve into how railway policies in the Gold Coast had political considerations and how the construction of railways consolidated colonial rule. This would provide insights into whether colonialism was meant to exploit colonial resources for the benefit of the colonial power or to maintain peace, the rule of law and develop the Gold Coast.

Heather J. Sharkey's paper explains how colonial states emerged in Africa and the nature of colonialism.³⁸ Notably, seven European countries claimed territories in Africa and devised administrations between the late 1800s and early 1900s. These comprised Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and Italy.³⁹ Different institutions were imposed to affect the spatial structure and urban interactions in African cities. On the one hand, the British for example, had indirect rule and a dual mandate within cities, permitting colonial and native sections to develop without an overall plan and coordination. On the other hand, the French focused on integrated city planning and land allocation mechanisms.⁴⁰ In the Gold Coast for example, and as it was in other British colonies in Africa, railway development facilitated the transportation of resources from the interior to the seaport for onward export to serve British industries. The above works on

³⁷ See *ibid.*; Boahen, *Africa under Colonial Domination*, 7.

³⁸ H. J. Sharkey, *African Colonial States*. In J. Parker & R. Reid (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 151.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁰ N. G. Baruah, et al., "Colonial Legacies: Shaping African Cities." *Serc Discussion Paper* 226, 2017, 1-73.

colonial rule in Africa and the Gold Coast place the study in its proper context and go a long way to serve as significant sources of reference to the study.

Railways and Socio-Economic Development in Colonial Africa

Before 1986, scholars who had specialised in the Economic History of Africa, European Colonialism and globalisation treated the development of railways in the Gold Coast as a subsection of their works. Some of these works are David Kimble's *A Political History of Ghana*, Peter R. Gould's *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana*, and H. P. White's "Recent Railway Developments in the Gold Coast".⁴¹ Most of these works basically focused on the economic impact of railways rather than their contribution to politics in the Gold Coast.

David Kimble talks about how it was necessary for the colonial government to roll out an efficient transport system to serve the mining and agricultural sectors of the country in the 1870s. He briefly highlights the railway policies of the British government in the 1890s. According to him, the decisive period for railway policy was between 1893 and 1895. By 1895, Joseph Chamberlain had suggested that the British could make strides in their colonies in Africa only when they invest some of their superfluous wealth in developing their estates. Numerous attempts were then made to construct railways, but the initial stages were not too successful.⁴² Regardless of the relevance of David Kimble's

⁴¹ Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 25-30; P. R. Gould, *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1960). Cited in Tsey, *Gold Coast Railways*, 8; H. P. White, "Recent Railway Developments in the Gold Coast." *Geography*, 40, (1955), 49 & 50.

⁴² *Ibid.* Kimble gives a clear description of the instances that led to the construction of railways and how it facilitated colonial exploitation of resources

work, the broad focus made it impossible to extensively deal with the relationship between railways and patterns of politics in the areas of the Gold Coast. It also did not provide a systematic insight into the nature and dynamics in the colonial railway policies. This study therefore highlights the nature and dynamics of colonial railway policies of the British government from 1874 to 1957. It also examines the interactions between railways and politics within the same period.

Gould as a geographer focused on the measurement of spatial movement of railway traffic in the Gold Coast.⁴³ Even though this work provides significant insights into the understanding of the railway developments in the Gold Coast, it does not extensively deal with how railways contributed to politics in the Gold Coast. This study seeks to address this gap.

Olufemi Omosini bemoaned the scanty literature on railway development in colonial West Africa in 1971 in his article “Railway Projects and British Attitude towards the Development of West Africa”.⁴⁴ Omosini records that very little is known of the antecedents of the railway, and this applies to all published accounts of railway development in other parts of British West Africa. Indeed, he also endorses the argument by Kimble regarding how railways contributed to economic growth. He posits that railways, the main legacy of the economic policies of colonialism have contributed immensely to the economic revolution of West Africa. It is however important to mention that colonial policies also impacted politics in colonies like the Gold Coast. This is why the study looks at how colonial railway policies contributed to politics in the Gold Coast.

⁴³ Gould, *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana*, 8.

⁴⁴ Omosini, “Railway Projects and British”, 507.

G. B. Kay's *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana* has documents and statistics, some official documents, from between 1920 and 1950. It also comprises a statistical abstract for the years 1900-1960.⁴⁵ More importantly, he considers the colonial economic policy on finance, transport, and agriculture - including cocoa and education. He argues that the emergence of 'an authentic Ghanaian capitalist class', fastened securely in the flourishing cocoa industry but moved steadily into other fields of private enterprise. On railways, he cites the Ormsby-Gore report which mentions that cocoa significantly influenced the construction of railways in the Gold Coast.⁴⁶ In this report, it is worthy to state that cocoa mainly stimulated the development of railways. This study however seeks to find out how political factors also played a key role in building railways.

Anthony Gerald Hopkins' *An Economic History of West Africa* generally emphasizes how modern transport stimulated economic growth.⁴⁷ He maintains that economists consistently mention modern transport facilities as important elements that bring about economic growth.⁴⁸ Other works that focused on the development of railways in colonial Africa and their economic benefits include V. E. A. Engman's *The Integration of Lake Transportation with Road and Railway Systems*; and W. A. Adote's *Economic Utilization of Ghana's Road and Rail*

⁴⁵ G. B. Kay, *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana. A Collection of Documents and Statistics 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 135-146.

⁴⁶*Ibid.* Kay illustrates his thesis with a detailed analysis of colonial policy as regards agriculture, transport, finance, and education. He shows with great skill how in each of these fields, and notably in the first three, the colonial administration continually acted under pressure from British capitalist interests to the disadvantage and detriment of the Ghanaian capitalist class, but without being able to disregard completely, let alone suppress or destroy, the burgeoning self-confidence and strength of the latter.

⁴⁷ Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 192.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Systems among others.⁴⁹ Even though these works offer important insights into how railways impacted the economy of the Gold Coast, they did not look at how railways contributed to colonial politics. The main objective of this study is to examine how railways contributed to politics in the Gold Coast.

Christian Tsey's work in 1986 also lamented that railway innovation in Colonial Africa has not been given systematic scholarly attention and that there is a need to fill this gap.⁵⁰ Such lacunae provide an opportunity for more historical scholarship on railway innovation in Africa, especially in the Gold Coast, a significant British colony. Christian Tsey argues that Kay contended that railways were an unimportant factor in the expansion of the cocoa industry. Kay was of the view that both the Eastern and Central lines could not effectively navigate the cocoa belt. Rather, except for the lower sections of the Eastern line, all the main lines were placed through the borders of the cocoa-growing areas. According to Kay, the major beneficiary of railways was the expatriate mining sector, but it could not serve the cocoa industry.⁵¹ This argument by Kay to some extent is misplaced. As Tsey records, except for the Central Province railways, whose construction followed the availability of motor lorries, the impact of the railways in the development of the Gold Coast cocoa industry has been underrated. Although the beans normally accounted for less than 20 percent of railway capacity on average, they contributed more than 50 percent of the gross

⁴⁹ V. E. A. Engmann, "The Integration of Lake Transportation with Road and Railway Systems: the Case of the Volta Basin in Ghana." MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1965; W. A. Adote, "Economic Utilization of Ghana's Road and Rail Systems." (PhD Dissertation, Washington State University, 1974). See also J. Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1984); R. Howard, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Ghana* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1978), 45.

⁵⁰ Omosini, "Railway Projects and British", 507; Tsey, *Gold Coast Railways*, iv, 1 & 2.

⁵¹ Tsey, *Gold Coast Railways*, 289.

earnings.⁵² Kay further highlights how the construction of roads after 1926 posed a serious challenge to railway development leading to its decline.⁵³

The above literature contributes to the scholarship on the interactions that exist between railway networks, innovations and development, and economic growth and to some extent, corroborate the contention by David Kimble and Olufemi Omosini. They provide significant understanding for this study to explore colonial railway development in the Gold Coast. However, it is worthy of note that railway development in Africa was not intended to bring about economic growth that was to enhance the standard of living of the African people. Benefits that came about because of railway networks and development were basically accidental. Notwithstanding the economic impact of railway development, there is no doubt that railways helped to establish and consolidate colonial power for easy and efficient administration of the Gold Coast. It is unfortunate that such an important element of colonial history is not given the needed scholarly attention. Probably, the focus of the above works made it impossible to extensively look at these things. This study makes an effort to explore the contribution of railways to politics and the connection between the economics and politics of railway development in the Gold Coast.

To address the imbalance within railway scholarship, various scholars have also published works on colonial railway networks, innovations and developments in Ghana and Africa after 1986. At least, Omosini and Tsey's concern over the paucity of literature on railway developments in colonial Africa

⁵² *Ibid.*, 308.

⁵³ Kay, *The Political Economy*, 135.

has been tackled, albeit more work needs to be done to cover the area of railways and politics in the Gold Coast. These works have different foci, and to some extent, do not provide enough extensive scholarly understanding of the interactions between railways and politics. Most of them did not systematically look at how railway development established and consolidated colonial rule for easy administration of the Gold Coast.

Lisa Lindsay's insightful article on railways in Nigeria considers the relationship between socio-economic conditions in late colonial southwestern Nigeria and the developing understanding of gender among railwaymen between 1940 and 1960.⁵⁴ Labour issues had become a very prominent subject during this period and this probably motivated her to take into consideration the significance of railways in colonial Africa. She further stipulates that Yoruba railway workers earned stable wages to become men and then accumulated money to marry and build houses. Interestingly, wives made claims on their husbands' wages to keep the house.⁵⁵ The connection between socio-economic situations in colonial southwestern Nigeria and growing ideas of gender among railwaymen is glaring. It is very relevant to the study because it demonstrates how the development of railways interacted with masculinity, and wage labor especially. However, the article basically focuses on railways in Nigeria and does not deal with the link between railways and politics. The present study, however, looks at the

⁵⁴ L. Lindsay, "No Need...to Think of Home"? Masculinity and Domestic Life on the Nigerian Railway, C. 1940-61", (1998), 439-466.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 440, 465 & 466. "...even as they adapted in response to new circumstances, they attempted to impose their visions of gender and family life upon the labor process. Metropolitan-encouraged ideals of male breadwinners and dependent wives held sway in some contexts, but they coexisted with a variety of practices and considerable discussion about the nexus between labor and home life."

connection between railways and politics in the Gold Coast. In 2005, N. J. K. Brukum examined the legacy of Guggisberg in Northern Ghana. Although Brukum argues that Guggisberg failed to develop the railway sector in the area, his work provides important information on the colonial government's railway policies in Northern Ghana which is relevant to the study.⁵⁶

Remi Jedwab and Alexander Moradi in 2011 investigated the effects of transportation infrastructure on agriculture and development in colonial Ghana.⁵⁷ They basically focused on the relationship between railway lines and cocoa production. They found a strong connection between railways and cocoa production. They also demonstrated that the economic growth in cocoa-producing areas was linked with demographic growth and urbanisation.⁵⁸ Remi Jedwab and Alexander Moradi together with Edward Kerby in 2014 did another study on railway development in Kenya.⁵⁹ Railways in colonial Kenya were constructed to facilitate efficient transportation of resources like ivory. It was revealed that railways had great effects on European settlements.⁶⁰ While these works contain much information on Africa and Gold Coast transportation system, their relevance and scope for the purpose of this study is limited by the fact that as Economists, the authors' main concern was to use fine spatial data to determine the strong effect of railroad connectivity on cocoa production and white settlements. In this

⁵⁶ Brukum makes it clear that the colonial government especially Guggisberg proposed on paper how it has planned to extend railway into the Northern Territory. He gives details of stakeholders who budgeted for the project. See Brukum, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg", 1919-1927." 8-10.

⁵⁷ R. Jedwab and A. Moradi, "Transportation Infrastructure and Development in Ghana." *Paris-Jordan Sciences Economiques*, (June, 2011), 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ R. Jedwab, E. Kerby, and A. Moradi, "History, Path Dependence and Development: Evidence from Colonial Railroads, Settlers and Cities in Kenya." 2 & 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-11

regard, information on the interactions between railway development and patterns of politics are limited in scope. The present study, therefore, addresses this limitation.

Komla Tsey in 2013 treated extensively, the subject of railway development in the Gold Coast and its social and economic impact.⁶¹ He examined the effect of railway development on the economy of the Gold Coast and the impact of new modes of transport on urbanisation and public health.⁶² More significantly, on urbanisation, Tsey argues that the railways and trade culminated in the growth of towns such as Accra, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi. Nevertheless, railways also made towns like Cape Coast and Kpong, which were not located on rail routes, lose their commercial and administrative significance. Railways were helpful in providing social services such as electricity, water supplies and public health facilities.⁶³

Even though Tsey's work provides significant insights into how railway construction brought about population growth, the provision of infrastructure and social amenities, it failed to provide enough information on some of the objectives of the study: the contribution of railways to politics. This suggests that although Tsey's work provides significant information to the study, its relevance to railways and politics is limited in scope. This proposed study does not only look

⁶¹ Tsey, *From Head-loading to the Iron Horse Railway Building*, i.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 181-186. See also Tsey, *Gold Coast Railways*, 232-331, 335. "Cape Coast, the key terminus of the inland trade, had been historically the most important commercial and administrative centre on the coast. However, as the major developments in cocoa farming and mining following railway construction occurred outside Cape Coast's sphere of influence, the large trading firms shifted their headquarters to the ports of Sekondi and Accra. Thus, between 1891 and 1911, Cape Coast's population stagnated at just over 11,000 and although there was an increase thereafter, the town's population growth lagged behind that of Accra, Sekondi-Takoradi and Kumasi."

at the interactions of railways and politics in the Gold Coast but also examines the connection between the politics and economics of railway development in the Gold Coast.

The Politics of Railways in Colonial Africa

Studies that are relevant to this work on the colonial history of railways in Africa also draw on political economy as the framework of analysis. Some of these studies explore the consciousness of railway workers in Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Niger.⁶⁴ And yet the railway played an important role in entrenching colonial rule in the Gold Coast. J. A. Jones analyses the consciousness of the skilled Senegalese and Malian workers on the Dakar-Niger railways that culminated in a six-month-long strike in the late 1940s. This clearly indicates the way mobile railway workers were at the forefront of nationalist political movements in Africa. There was another intense labour activism and radical politics in Atbara, the headquarters of the Sudan Railways.⁶⁵ In this instance, a lot of railway workers were more settled and some may have yielded to the careful scrutiny and management of railway worker welfare as in a South African case.⁶⁶ It is obvious that African railway labour history in all its aspects remains a fertile research field and this study takes the opportunity to explore ways railway workers contributed to the struggle for independence in the Gold Coast.

⁶⁴ T. A. Ayoola, "Political economy of rail transport in Nigeria, 1945-1985." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Manchester University, 2004), 56; J. M. Mwaruvie, "Political Economy of Railway Extensions in Kenya: the case of the Uasin Gishu Plateau, 1901-1930." (Ph.D. Dissertation, West Virginia University, 2005), 29.

⁶⁵ A. A. Sikainga, *Transport Workers' Town: 'City of Steel and Fire': A Social History of Atbara, Sudan's Railway Town, 1906-84* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 38.

⁶⁶ J. Tayler, "Combating Unfavourable Conditions: Experiments in Scientific social Work and Community Development in the South African Railways, 1935-1952", *Kleio* 36, 2004, 107-25.

Even after 1986, only a few of the works on railways have dealt with railways and politics in the Gold Coast. It is not enough to always look at one aspect of railways in the Gold Coast such as the economic impact of railways. It is important to explore how the politics of railways also paved the way for the efficient transportation of resources, the massive flow of trade and the economic development of the Gold Coast. Making strides toward addressing this scholarly imbalance, this study explores the development of railways and their interactions with patterns of politics in the Gold Coast.

Scholarly works on the contribution of railways to politics in the Gold Coast tended to focus on railway contribution towards the dismantling of colonialism. These works focused on railway unionism and radical politics and contributed immensely to the debates of this study. One important work on railways and politics that is worth mentioning is Leslie Lacy's M. A. thesis, "A History of Railway Unionism in Ghana".⁶⁷ Contributing to the studies on railways and politics, Lacy argues that the protests and strikes by railway workers in 1960 and 1961 demonstrated the consciousness of the people.⁶⁸ Such understanding makes it clear that the unrests of the workers were to put the government on its toes to ensure that they had good working conditions. However, what is not captured in her work is how the development of railways entrenched and consolidated colonial rule in the Gold Coast. The huge contribution of railways to the colonial economy of the Gold Coast makes it imperative to explore how they

⁶⁷ Lacy, "A History of Railway Unionism in Ghana." 47.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

helped in consolidating colonial rule. This is why this current study examined how railway development helped in strengthening colonial rule in the Gold Coast.

Other relevant works on railways and politics in Ghana were written by Richard Jeffries: “The Labour Aristocracy”, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: the Railwaymen of Sekondi*. Jeffries waded into the burgeoning historical scholarship on the contribution of railways to politics with these insightful works on railway workers in Ghana in 1975 and 1978 respectively.⁶⁹ Particularly, his works focus on the 1950 and 1961 strike actions of railway and harbour workers in Sekondi-Takoradi in support of Nkrumah’s Positive Action and against the TUC leadership respectively. According to Jeffries, the 1961 strike action became successful as Nkrumah purged some of the most corrupt among the party’s leadership.⁷⁰ His works contribute to the debates of this study on how railways contributed to politics in Ghana. Jeffries’ works contribute to African labour and trade union history, and the economic and political impact of railway development in Africa, specifically in the Gold Coast. He argues that the skilled railway workers in Ghana attributed the administration’s failure to greed, and embezzlement of railway finances by senior executives which culminated in strikes and demonstrations in Sekondi-Takoradi.⁷¹ The works also provide historical insights into how railway workers occasioned Nkrumah’s positive action to fight the colonial authority. Particularly, they bring to the fore, how the organisation and radicalism of the railway workers’ union in Sekondi and

⁶⁹ Jeffries, “The Labour Aristocracy?”, 65-69; Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, xii, 2, 244. R. D. Jeffries, *The Politics of Trade Unionism in Ghana* (London: University of London Press, 1974), 58.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Takoradi contributed greatly to the pace and nature of political change in Ghana. Railways became an efficient transport system and it eventually provided employment to the people of the Gold Coast after independence. Even though Richard Jeffries' works give a detailed account of railway and politics, particularly railway unionism and radical politics and how railway workers became crucial to the decolonisation of the Gold Coast, they failed to give a comprehensive account of how the same railways were used by the colonial government to consolidate colonial rule. The present study, therefore, adds up to the knowledge of railways and politics in the Gold Coast by examining how the colonial government used the construction of railways to entrench colonial rule in the Gold Coast.

Another similar work which contributes to the discussions on railways and politics in the Gold Coast is Chada Zinyama's work on "Labour Protest, Group Consciousness and Trade Unionism in West Africa: *the Radical Railway Workers of Colonial Ghana, 1900-1950.*"⁷² Zinyama's work underscores the political impact of railways by examining the consciousness of railway workers in Africa which was because of the poor working and living conditions. However, other political impacts such as railway development and power consolidation were not captured in his work. This present study seeks to look at how railways played a role in consolidating power.

In conclusion, it is also obvious from the above literature that colonial governments in West Africa relied heavily on railways for efficient transportation of resources for economic development, and railway workers played a key role in

⁷² Zinyama, "Labour Protest, Group Consciousness and Trade Unionism in West Africa", 45.

radical politics. What is, however, not so clear in the existing literature is the role of railways in the administration and political control of colonies. This work seeks to fill this gap.

The study that attempts to address this gap is Clarence Davies and Kenneth Wilburn's edited work, *Railway Imperialism*. It buttresses the argument that railways helped in the establishment and maintenance of imperial influence in areas formal colonial political authority was difficult to establish.⁷³ This according to them occurred in a place like South America.⁷⁴ Even though this study provides significant insights into how railways played a key role in maintaining power, its setting was elsewhere in South America rather than in the Gold Coast. This thesis then looks at the extent to which railways consolidated colonial rule in the Gold Coast which Davies and Wilburn did not address.

Significance of the Study

In addressing the scholarly gap, the study contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on colonialism by providing significant insights into the nexus between economic expansion and politics. Examining the interactions between railway development and patterns of politics deepens our understanding of the nexus between the economics and politics of railway development in the Gold Coast.

⁷³ C. B. Davis, and K. E. Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism* (London: Greenwood Press, 1991), 175.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Methodology and Sources

The study is a historical research that is qualitative in nature and adopts the historical narrative approach.⁷⁵ The qualitative method critically examined and interpreted the data obtained to show connections of the various themes of the study. The study relied on three data sources: archival sources, document reviews and oral sources (interviews). The archival documents were obtained from Ghana's Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Accra, Cape Coast, Takoradi and Kumasi. Specifically, the study made use of information from the Annual Departmental Reports of the various colonial government Departments. Information was also obtained from Departmental Reports with file numbers ADM 5/1, ADM 5/4, ADM 6/1, ADM 23/1, NP 12/1, WRG 15/1, and WRG 24/1, and ARG 1/8 in PRAAD, Accra, Cape Coast, Takoradi and Kumasi. Documents at the Colonial Secretary Office in Accra (CSO 7/11, CSO 7/8, CSO 7/9, CSO 16/1 and CSO 21/1) were also used. Reports of the Transport Department established in 1902 were consulted. This information provided yearly statistics and reports on the development of railways in the Gold Coast. It also offered significant information on railway policy decisions and outcomes, and their political impact. Other relevant documents from the Railway authority were also employed.

The study also relied on significant data from The National Archives of the UK (TNA-Online). Annual departmental records obtained from the online archives were used concurrently with ADM files obtained from PRAAD. Access

⁷⁵ J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2014), 232.

to this online database contributed to expanding the scope of the work and provided information which would have otherwise been out of reach. Secondary sources of information such as books, articles, and other documents relevant to the study were used. These were obtained from the Balme Library at the University of Ghana, the Sam Jonah Library, at the University of Cape Coast, and the Osagyefo Library, at the University of Education, Winneba. Articles were also retrieved from relevant online journals. The primary and secondary documentary sources of information for the study were analysed and categorised to show connections to the themes which were developed in the presentation of the research findings.

Oral sources of information (specifically interviews) were also used to complement the primary and secondary documentary sources of information. Oral sources of information according to Monsuru Babatunde Muraina have been a universal form of historical consciousness, which usually operate alongside writing.⁷⁶ These sources describe the standard, internally derived data that carry the ideology, philosophy, history, and worldview of societies. The use of oral sources then became imperative in this study. The interviews were conducted in Sekondi-Takoradi and the respondents were ex-Ghanaian railway workers who had knowledge about the contribution of railway workers to the decolonization process in the Gold Coast. Sekondi-Takoradi was the epicentre of the series of labour unrests that eventually culminated in the declaration of Positive Action in January 1950. Four respondents were interviewed in Sekondi-Takoradi. The

⁷⁶ M. Babatunde Muraina, "Oral Tradition as a Reliable Source of Historical Writing: Arguments for and Against and Implications for Historical Writing in Education." *Historical Research Letter*, 22, 2015, 17.

respondents gave insights into how the poor working conditions of railway workers influenced them to consistently petition the railway department and colonial government to come to their aid. They also gave information on how the inability of the colonial government to address their working conditions resulted in numerous railways strikes and demonstrations. In all these, they highlighted the significant role of some railway union leaders and workers in the agitation against maltreatment by the colonial government.

In the interview process, the purposeful sampling technique was used to sample respondents. This technique ensured that participants who had the ability to elucidate the phenomenon or concept of the study were identified and selected. This technique was significant in sampling respondents because it afforded the researcher the opportunity to identify and choose some Sekondi-Takoradi community members who had significant information that helped the study meet its goals. The information given by the respondents was relevant because it helped to address the gaps that the documentary sources could not fill. The oral interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, which made it easier to read extensively for the study.

Limitations

Two major challenges were encountered during the data collection process. The first challenge was the unavailability of knowledgeable participants who could give relevant information for the purpose of the study. Those who were available in Sekondi-Takoradi were very few and could not give all the necessary information needed. The researcher, therefore, depended on the use of very

significant primary sources of information from Ghana's Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Accra, Cape Coast, Takoradi and Kumasi to address this challenge.

The second challenge was the nature of some of the archival documents at PRAAD, Accra. Some of the Annual Departmental Reports in the 1890s were torn and could not be used. Fortunately, the researcher was able to address this challenge by accessing these departmental reports from The National Archives of the UK (TNA-Online).

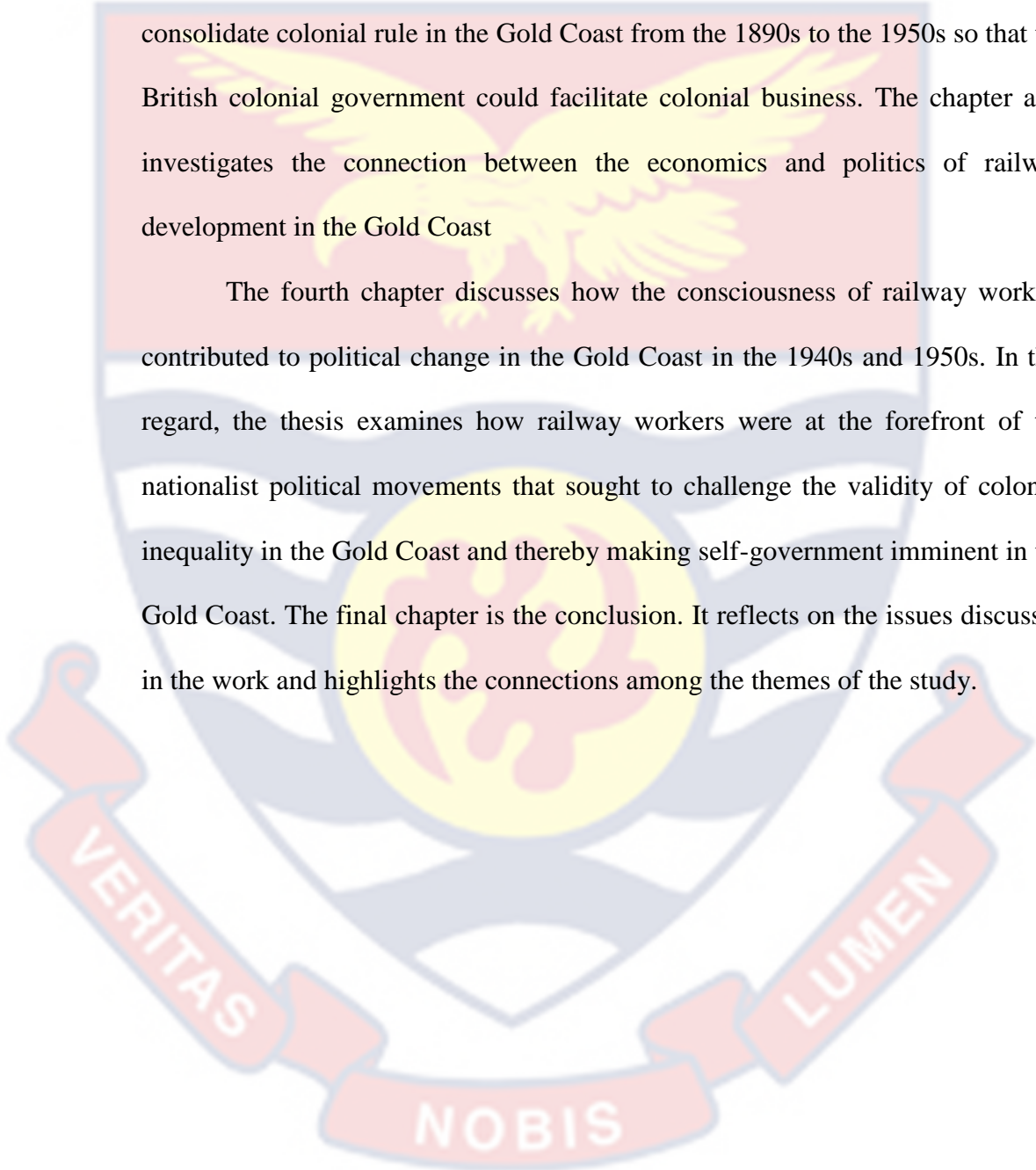
Organisation of the Study

The study is organised into five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction to the study. The introduction gives an overview of the whole research. It provides a historical background of railways in Africa and the Gold Coast and highlights the statement of the problem, the objectives of the work and the significance of the study. It reviews relevant literature and points out the gaps that the current study hopes to fill and outlines the methodology and sources of the study. Lastly, it spells out the organisational structure of the study.

Chapter two explores railway proposals, plans, policy decisions and outcomes of the British government, especially from 1874 when the Gold Coast became a British colony through to the early 1900s, the formative period of railway policies. The study provides systematic insights into the nature and dynamics of colonial railway policies. It also discusses how from a slow beginning, the Western Province of the Gold Coast received massive railway development in the 1900s. It again looks at the politics of railway development in

the Central Province. The study moreover examines why the development of railways was sited in areas endowed with agricultural and mineral resources. The third chapter evaluates how the development of railways helped to establish and consolidate colonial rule in the Gold Coast from the 1890s to the 1950s so that the British colonial government could facilitate colonial business. The chapter also investigates the connection between the economics and politics of railway development in the Gold Coast

The fourth chapter discusses how the consciousness of railway workers contributed to political change in the Gold Coast in the 1940s and 1950s. In this regard, the thesis examines how railway workers were at the forefront of the nationalist political movements that sought to challenge the validity of colonial inequality in the Gold Coast and thereby making self-government imminent in the Gold Coast. The final chapter is the conclusion. It reflects on the issues discussed in the work and highlights the connections among the themes of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

RAILWAY PROPOSALS, PLANS, POLICY DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES, 1874-1901

Introduction

As the first step towards the official colonisation of the Gold Coast, the British established the Gold Coast colony in 1874 and sought to consolidate their power. As agreed during the partition of West African colonies at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), the British became increasingly concerned about having an effective administration that will facilitate their control over the colony of the Gold Coast. Following the establishment of a skeletal administrative structure, the British government hoped to acquire raw materials from the colony.¹ It was then left to the colonial government to build infrastructure to achieve this objective. By the early 1900s, the British colonial authorities with their economic exploitative mindset had extended their dominion over Asante and the Northern Territories. It was to achieve this economic ambition that the building of railway infrastructure was contemplated.

To boost trade, and revenue and firmly establish the exploitative system that they sought to institute, there was the need to build transport infrastructure.² It should be noted that the major means of transport in the 1870s was head portage.³ Due to inadequate tracks in the primary forests of the south, an

¹ C. E. Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways: the Making of a Colonial Economy, 1879-1929." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1986), 23.

² *Ibid.*

³ Jedwab, and Moradi, "Colonial Investments and Long-Term Development in Africa", PSE Working Paper, 2012, 6. For more information on head portage in Malawi and Zambia, see E. Mandala, "Feeding and Fleecing the Native: how the Nyasaland Transport System Distorted a New Food Market, 1890s-1920s." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, 2006, 505; J. B.

efficient transportation system was a very big challenge to colonial designs in the Gold Coast.⁴ Railways at the time had become a very efficient system of transport in Europe as the United Kingdom first built railways in 1825.⁵ With this, the British Parliament concluded that railways in West Africa would go a long way to provide a policy of enlarged markets and would help to establish strong administration and allow for the well-being of the people.⁶ This means that railways were seen not only as the appropriate technology to facilitate transportation in the colonies that would allow for economic exploitation but also as a means to establish effective administration over the colonies.

This chapter explores the various considerations leading to the conceptualisation of railway policies and their outcomes. Specifically, the chapter explores why the colonial government was unable to build railways in the Gold Coast before 1893 despite its advantages. It also discusses railway funding and the various proposals brought forward by private companies and the politics of these proposals. The chapter argues that the colonial government initially engaged private individuals and entities to plan railway construction because it had no clear railway policy or scheme on which the administration depended for progress in building railways. However, railways received significant attention when the government's imperial policy changed towards developing colonial estates. Henceforth, railway policy decisions and outcomes were geared towards consolidating colonial power.

Gewald, "Transport Transforming Society: Towards a History of Transport in Zambia, 1890-1930." African Studies Centre Working Paper No. 74 Leiden, 2007.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ M. Casson, *The World's First Railway System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

⁶ Great Britain, *House of Commons Debate*, House of Commons, 22 August 1895. 581-652.

Early Railway Proposals, Plans, and Schemes Before 1893

Railways were crucial to the development of overseas colonies. With the United Kingdom building railways in 1825, the advantages of this transport infrastructure in the development of the Gold Coast were obvious.⁷ The importance of railways in the British colonial expansion in West Africa was reported by various colonial departments, newspapers, politicians, and railway promoters among others.⁸ As such, various reasons were given for the building of railways which always enhanced economic development and imperial expansion. Some economic reasons for railway construction in the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone were to develop the trade and mining industries.⁹ The promoters of railways in British West African colonies, such as the delegation to Chamberlain of the Chambers of Commerce, argued that railways would develop old markets and create new ones for the benefit of British business. The deputation desired an increase in trade, specifically in rubber. The cost of portage at the time had increased and as a result, the lack of investments in areas rich in natural products continued to be poor. They, therefore, urged the construction of railways to serve as defensive tools and to create employment.¹⁰

One of the political reasons for the building of railways was to establish and consolidate colonial territories. Clarence Davies and Kenneth Wilburn's edited work, *Railway Imperialism* buttresses the argument that railways helped in

⁷ See Casson, *The World's First Railway System*, 1.

⁸ See *The Gold Coast Chronicle*, 18 Feb. 1893, cited in Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 26.

⁹ *The Leeds Mercury*, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and the African Trade, Sept. 22, 1894. Cited in Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 26.

¹⁰ *Daily News*, West African Railways, August 24, 1895; *Liverpool Mercury*, West African Railways, August 24, 1895. Cited in Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 26.

the establishment and maintenance of imperial influence in areas formal colonial political authority was difficult to establish.¹¹ This according to them occurred in a place like South America.¹² In West Africa too, the building of railways was also to ensure that informal territories like the interior of the colonies were formally controlled. In fact, imperial railway expansion was significant to imperial expansion as these railways were both a cause and result of that expansion. In this regard, railways and imperialism were intricately intertwined and went hand in hand.¹³ Moreover, Sir George Baden-Powell, MP, stated that the idea of building railways to open up West Africa would have lasting effects of demonstrating that Britain aimed at maintaining its power.¹⁴ The economic and political benefits of railway development in the colonies were also emphatically stated by Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Lugard, especially in the last decade of the 19th century.¹⁵ It is obvious that economic and political reasons were by far the most important factors for building railways to enhance colonial expansion in British West Africa, specifically, in the Gold Coast. With these benefits, the British colonial government made various efforts toward having clear policies to guide the building of railways in the colony.

David Kimble observes that the first railway project in the Gold Coast was to ship materials for a light tramway from Cape Coast to the River Prah in 1873. However, it became unsuccessful due to the lack of planning. Subsequently, the

¹¹ C. B. Davis, and K. E. Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism* (London: Greenwood Press, 1991), 175.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Daily News*, West African railways, August 24, 1895.

¹⁵ See Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*; Dumett, "Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy".

colonial office could think of no alternative use for the rolling stock.¹⁶ Olufemi Omosini regards this project as a panic measure.¹⁷ He explains that Sir Garnet Wolseley who was governor at the time embarked on a military campaign against the Asante and that he used British troops in this expedition. Faced with the challenge of transporting the troops to these warring areas, he decided to build a light tramway from the Cape Coast Castle in the direction of Asante. He indicated that it was challenging to recruit carriers for the soldiers and that some of the carriers could be spies working for the Asante. He also recalled that the experience of the operations conducted in 1863-4 shows that the Coolies employed near the coast were not trustworthy. The War Office was advised to provide a narrow, 18-inch railway which could quickly be laid down for thirty miles from Cape Coast Castle to Manza. About £100,000 was estimated as the cost for the project, and he was optimistic that the whole line could be put into operation within two and half months.¹⁸ The first proposal suggests that there was a lack of a viable railway policy.

Even though plans for constructing railways were also put forward in 1879, it was not until 1893 that the colonial government made attempts to ensure that construction had begun. From 1873, the colonial government began to receive railway proposals from private promoters in and outside the Gold Coast. However, all proposals made to the colonial government for railway development

¹⁶ D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 26.

¹⁷ O. Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude towards the Development of West Africa, 1872-1903." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5, No. 4, June 1971, 493.

¹⁸ Sir G. Wolseley, "Memorandum on the Proposed Railway ' dated 2nd September 1873, C. O. 96/103.

between 1873 and 1893 were turned down because they could not meet the conditions set by the colonial government.¹⁹ It can be suggested that the colonial government did not have a clear policy for railway development in the period between 1873 and 1893. Perhaps there was no strong will towards the provision of railways in colonies. However, with the appointment of Joseph Chamberlain as the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1895, and Governor William Maxwell as the governor of the Gold Coast, British colonial policy shifted towards constructive exploitation.²⁰

Chamberlain proposed that if the government was to make progress in developing and maintaining its colonies, it should take the responsibility of building its own railways. In this regard, he believed that the availability of private investments in the colonies could lead the government to provide the necessary infrastructure like railways. He advised that the government alone could not construct roads and railways and so private individuals must also be consulted. Without this, Britain had no future in these colonies as he believed railways shall stimulate investment and employment.²¹ Here, with recommendations from Chamberlain, the colonial government began to develop the colonies for its own benefit. Railway policy was clear and the government

¹⁹ Colonial Office to Messrs Bircham and Co., March 25, 1887, C. O. Print, Africa No. 451; The Earl of Kimberly to Sir Samuel Rowe, Governor of the Gold Coast April 4, 1881, C. O. Print, Africa No. 451; Colonial Office Memorandum dated December, 1886, C. O. Print, Africa No. 451. Cited in Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 26

²⁰ *The Economist*, West African Trade and Colonial Development, Aug. 24, 1895; Charles, Boyd, *W. Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, 2 (London: London Constable and Company Ltd., 1914). See also B. U. Ukelina, *The Second Colonial Occupation: Development Planning, Agriculture, and the Legacies of British Rule in Nigeria* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), xviii.

²¹ The National Archives of the UK (Henceforth TNA), Online: Public Record Office, London (Henceforth P. R. O.), C.O. 96/260, Colonial Office Minutes on the Proposed West African Railway Schemes, 20 August 1895.

became more committed to building lines in the Gold Coast. Governor Maxwell also contributed immensely to the growth and consolidation of the Gold Coast through the policy of building railways.²²

In 1893, the colonial government gave approval for railway surveys to be done in the Gold Coast. The indecision and delay in railway construction before the 1890s were because of the absence of official commitment to colonial development. Colonial officials believed that colonies must be self-sufficient. Due to the lack of funds, the colonial government could not invest in assessing the economic benefits of the colony and they were not very sure of the returns if they were to seek funds to invest in the colony. It took the courage and vision of Chamberlain and other imperial enthusiasts to turn around the fortunes of railway development, at a time when the only choice to maintain their colonies was to explore the path of developing the colonies.

From the 1870s, private entities who were regarded as speculators attempted to persuade the colonial government that it was possible to build railways in the Gold Coast but failed.²³ It should be noted that the government attempted to clear trade routes and construct roads for colonial officials to travel by hammock.²⁴ In this regard, the government decided to pay stipends to chiefs of the Gold Coast so that they could organise communal labour to clear roads. An allowance of £2 per mile encouraged chiefs to construct more roads. However, such efforts were not too successful as it was reported that by 1889, there were

²² TNA: Colonial Office, London (Henceforth C. O.), C.O. 96/260, Colonial Office instructions to Sir William Maxwell on appointment as Governor, 20 March 1895.

²³ Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways", 11.

²⁴ TNA: P. R. O., London, C. O. 96/107, Acting Administrator Lees to Secretary of State, 23 May, 1874.

hardly any roads in the largest coastal towns in the Gold Coast.²⁵ Existing roads were ordinary footpaths without bridges with high bushes on either side and often blocked with falling trunks and flooded with water during rainy seasons.²⁶ Such a situation placed a greater burden on trade even when corporate mining had begun in the interior as the only major means of transportation at the time was head loading which was also relatively expensive. In a letter to the Colonial Office, Governor Maxwell lamented the high cost of head portage which cost about £10 to carry one ton of goods for 60 miles.²⁷ It was estimated that the transport cost of goods was fifty percent of the price paid to African producers of palm oil and rubber- the major cash crops in the Gold Coast. Head portage moreover had its challenges as it was seen as slow, inefficient, and unreliable.²⁸

From 1875, private individuals and companies continued to engage the government to build railways in the Gold Coast. Even though by 1878, two expatriate mining firms had begun concession in Wassa and Tarkwa Districts, the initial proposal to build railways in the Gold Coast came from a mercantile community which was in charge of the colony's import and export trade rather than these mining firms.²⁹ Such a proposal was first brought before the government in 1879 when the editor of *The African Times*, Fitzgerald, and former Director of Public Works in the Gold Coast, Mercer, engaged the government to guarantee a proposed company known as the West African Railroad, Tramways

²⁵ Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, Report on Economic Agriculture in the Gold Coast, (C. 5891, 1889), 32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ TNA: P. R. O., London, C. O. Print, Africa No. 451. Governor Maxwell to Colonial Office, on Captain Lang's Surveys, 1 July 1893.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ J. Silver, "The Failure of European Mining Companies in the Nineteenth Century Gold Coast." *Journal of African History* 22, 1981, 511-515.

and Canal Company. The firm was to construct three railway lines, that is, through the Western, Central and Eastern routes.³⁰ On the Western route, railway lines were to be built from the Shama Wassa gold mine in the Western Province; on the Central route, it was proposed to start from Saltpond to serve the palm oil and rubber districts of the Central Province; and on the Eastern route, the lines were to commence from Accra to Kpong on the Volta to serve the Eastern palm oil and cotton districts. In addition to the three proposed lines, they also planned to build a fourth line from Lagos to Abeokuta, in Yoruba country.³¹

The whole proposal which was narrow-gauge railways was to cost £2,500 per mile. That is, they planned to spend a total sum of £500,000 for the 150 miles of railways that they were going to build. They pleaded with the Government for a guarantee of four percent of this amount, but the Colonial Office doubted the ability of the promoters to raise funds for the project. It could also be seen that the colonial government had no control over the land, especially beyond the neighbourhood of the coastal forts. The Government was unable to guarantee because it could not secure those building railways from interference and danger. Furthermore, the Colonial Secretary felt the scheme was too general and ambitious to be entertained by the Government.³² In spite of this, Fitzgerald and Mercer believed that railways were crucial to the material and spiritual development of West Africa. They argued that in addition to an increase in commerce and the local government revenue, railways would also bring about the

³⁰ TNA: P. R. O., London, C.O. 96/129, Messrs Fitzgerald and Mercer to Colonial Office, June 23, 1879.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude", 496.

spread of civilisation and Christianity and eventually become a means of uniting the scattered isolated tribes and uniting them together as a people. Moreover, the building of the proposed lines would boost the gold-mining industry of the Gold Coast.³³ Basically, the railway policy was economically oriented because the proposal sought to link railways to agricultural and mineral-rich areas.

Despite the attempts by Fitzgerald and Mercer to get their proposal approved, the colonial government failed to respond to them. The Colonial Office failed to approve their proposal due to its unrealistic nature. The government was even not ready to enter into any agreement of guarantee with them because it was not economically beneficial to do so. In this regard, the Colonial Office was not sure about the ability of the proposers to raise that amount of capital to finance the project. Finally, it was impossible to secure land for the intended routes as the colonial government had no control over lands that went beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the coastal forts.³⁴

As a result, Fitzgerald and Mercer established connections with very influential West African Merchants and two Members of Parliament to sign a petition that stipulated an urgent need for railways in the Gold Coast. With backing from the businessmen and Members of Parliament, they disagreed with the Colonial Office's argument of having no power to grant lands for railways. Fitzgerald and Mercer supported their argument with Ordinance 8 of 1876 by stating that the government could make grants of wasteland for public works. They, moreover, reemphasized their humanistic intention to support their bid.

³³ *Ibid.*, 495.

³⁴ Mercer's circular to the West African Merchants, 5 May 1.

They insisted that the project would relieve the people from the challenges they encountered in their efforts to transport their heavy goods to the market and end a great amount of suffering.³⁵

However, the Colonial Office refused to accept their proposal. In supporting their position, the government argued that even if it had the right to grant them wasteland, it may not be a judicious thing to do because such land may not be regarded as waste by the local people. The colonial Office further raised concerns about the lack of labour to execute the project. The issue was linked to Garnet Wolseley's failure to build railways in the Gold Coast in 1873 due to inadequate labour.³⁶ Fitzgerald and Mercer were accused of seeking monopoly over the concession in the Gold Coast so that they could exclude any other capitalist who may want to build railways in the Gold Coast in future. Omosini has concluded that there was no need to give the promoters that position.³⁷ Considering the labour question, the Colonial Office saw the proposal of Fitzgerald and Mercer to build railways as a huge task that was beyond their capabilities.³⁸ As a result, the Colonial Office firmly turned down their proposal. Fitzgerald was then disappointed and started to bemoan the Colonial Office's unfortunate and reactionary attitude towards the material development of West Africa, and African apathy towards his projects.³⁹ In fact, the apathy of the

³⁵ C.O. 96/129, Fitzgerald and Mercer to Colonial Office. Undated. Cited in Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude", 496.

³⁶ C. O. 96/129, Minute by Meade, 30 August 1879. Cited in Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude", 496.

³⁷ Hemming's Minute, 31 August 18, C.O. 96/1 29. Cited in Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude".

³⁸ Minute by Meade, 30 August 1879. Cited in Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude".

³⁹ Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude", 496.

colonial government towards the building of railways in the Gold Coast was also evident in this regard. The government at the time had not come to the realization of fully investing in the colony for its own benefits and as a result, made no significant efforts to address the bottlenecks of the railway proposal. It is therefore in the right place to contend that until the 1890s when the change in colonial policy became crucial to the consolidation of the Gold Coast colony, the British colonial government had not made plans to develop its colonial estates.

Railway Proposals from the 1880s

One proposal also came from Le Brun, a French merchant, and an agent for the Dutch Government in the Gold Coast to construct a fifty-mile line to link Elmina and Praso. Another proposal was a line to link Accra with Elmina which also came from F. Bary, a British railway engineer.⁴⁰ Interestingly, in May 1883, a whopping forty-eight expatriate merchants in the Gold Coast came together to put forward a proposal of a forty-mile railway line from Elmina to open up the central agricultural areas.⁴¹ In the same year, the Cape Coast merchants sent a deputation to the Governor calling for the construction of railways to extend its administrative control beyond the castles. They then forwarded a detailed memorandum to the Colonial Office to facilitate this agenda. They proposed the construction of two railway lines from Cape Coast to Denkyira and from Cape Coast to Saltpond estimated at £58,000 for the two lines. The Colonial Office's response ruled out the possibility of a government guarantee and stated that if any

⁴⁰ TNA: C.O. (London) Print Africa No. 451. Governor to Secretary of State forwarding Le Brun's proposal, March 18, 1881.

⁴¹ See TNA: P. R. O., London, C.O. 96/129, Fitzgerald and Mercer to Colonial Office, August 11, 1879; C. O. Print, Africa No. 451, Governor to Secretary of State forwarding the merchants proposal, May 19, 1883.

railway would pay its way in the colony, it would have to be constructed by the colonial government on its own, and not by private enterprise.⁴² They turned down the guarantee system because they saw it as very expensive and not economically beneficial as the British colonial governments elsewhere suffered losses when it provided a guarantee for some firms.

It is clear from the above discussions that between the 1870s and 1880s, proposals and ideas on railways mostly came from private individuals and firms who were increasingly concerned about investing their capital in a venture that was seen as lucrative and crucial to the British colonial agenda. However, it seems that most of them were ignorant about the guarantee system which was not regarded as beneficial. Looking at the huge amount required to carry out railway projects and taking into consideration the red flags raised on the failure of the guarantee system, the private firms should have proposed other viable alternatives if they seriously wanted to be considered for the project. Their consistent demand for government subsidies also demonstrates that they were incapable of financing the project.

Three significant reasons accounted for the government's failure to approve those proposals. First, John Hurd attributes the government's failure to approve the proposals to its reluctance to bring up the guarantee system into the Gold Coast.⁴³ With this system, private firms solicited for government guarantee or assurance of interest on the capital disbursement. Second, land acquisition was a very big issue in the government's consideration of approving railway

⁴² Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude", 500.

⁴³ J. H. Hurd, "Railways". In D. Kumar, and M. Desai (Eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*. Vol. 2 *C1757 – 1970*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 738.

proposals.⁴⁴ The railway promoters wanted free land to build railways, with rights to trade, cultivate, and mine. This was perceived as having the potential of claiming large territories in the future.⁴⁵ The colonial office, therefore, became concerned that such claims could affect their political and social relationship with the local chiefs as lands were under the control of the local chiefs and were valuable to them. The land issue culminated in the attempts by the colonial government to pass Land Bills in 1894 and 1897 so that they could have access to land for the building of colonial infrastructure. Third and finally, promoters' financial incapability was also an underlying factor in the government's unwillingness to approve their proposals. Building railways needed very sound financial backing and so the government expected private firms that tendered their proposals to have strong financial backing.

The failure of the colonial government to provide guarantees was partly because it did not have enough funds to do so. The colonial policy of colonies catering for their own development clearly demonstrates that the Gold Coast had not yet been fully developed and was not in the best position to finance any huge railway project at the time. The inability of the Colonial Office to finance railway projects explains why it gave opportunities to private firms to submit their proposals.

Governor Griffith (1883-1895) also raised concerns about the inadequate labour for the construction of railways in the Gold Coast. It should be noted that the labour question has existed since the antecedents of colonialism. Garnet

⁴⁴ C. U. Ilegbune, "Concessions Scramble and Land Alienation in British Southern Ghana, 1885 - 1915", *African Studies Review* 19, no. 3, 1976, 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Wolseley's failure to build railways in the Gold Coast in 1873 was due to inadequate labour. Governor Griffith believed that if such a project was to be undertaken, it was necessary to have efficient labour. The British colonial government had the option to import labour from Europe for the construction of railways but that was expensive. More importantly, Griffith was increasingly concerned about railway funds which was a constraint on railway development in the Gold Coast.⁴⁶ In this context, the colonial government in the Gold Coast, especially in the 1880s, was aware of the difficulties (in the form of finances, labour, and land) in building railways in the colony. Governor Griffith then came to the conclusion that it was not yet time for the Gold Coast to begin the construction of railways and that if in future, it intended to undertake any railway project, the government would consider the state of its finances.⁴⁷ The idea of building railways in the Gold Coast in the 1880s was abandoned because of financial challenges, however, the government was determined to start the construction of railways in future when it was able to address the financial constraints.

Olufemi Omosini controversially records that some philanthropists and humanitarians also showed interest in undertaking other projects in Africa and he claimed that they had motives of extending civilisation and Christianity into Africa. However, these humanitarians had no funds to carry out their projects, and all attempts to secure financial assistance from the government had also failed.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁷ TNA: C.O. (London) Print, Africa No. 451, Governor Griffith to Lord Knutsford, March 25, 1889.

⁴⁸ Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude", 492.

In as much as the colonial government had turned down the proposals from railway promoters due to financial constraints, it also refused to grant financial support to railway promoters who wanted to carry out altruistic activities in the Gold Coast. The idea of building railways basically for humanitarian reasons is questionable. The development of railways in British colonies in West Africa was essentially to create, expand and unify colonies under a strong British influence so that the ultimate agenda of exploiting colonial resources to the advantage of the mother country could be achieved. The reasons for the building of railways were clearly stated by enthusiastic imperial expansionists Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Lugard, and other imperial crusaders in the 1890s when the colonial policy of constructive imperialism became clear after the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference.

Even though the colonial government failed to secure financial assistance to build railways in the Gold Coast, it never lost sight of developing railways in the colony. Considering the motives and ways of expansion across Africa, the colonial government in the Gold Coast was keen on working out plans to ensure that railways were built in the colony.⁴⁹ It should be noted that the British were compelled to hasten their plans toward building railways in the Gold Coast because of its European rivals- the French and Germans, and the pressure brought upon all European powers to consolidate their authority over all colonies in Africa after the Brussels Conference of 1889-1890. It was suggested in the conference

⁴⁹ A. G. Hopkins, "Economic Imperialism in West Africa, 1880-1892, Lagos", *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., XXI, 3, December 1968; Eric Stokes, "The Late Nineteenth Century Colonial Expansion and the Attack on the Theory of Economic Imperialism. A Case of mistaken Identity?". *The Historical Journal*, XII.

that all European nations in Africa should establish an effective administration through the construction of railways and roads to claim their colonial territories.⁵⁰

Railway Policy Decisions and Outcomes, 1893-1901

The change of imperial economic policy towards constructive imperialism in the 1890s revolutionised railway building in the Gold Coast. According to Joseph Chamberlain, the idea of constructive imperialism would guide the colonial government to invest in infrastructures such as building railways for easy exploitation of the resources of the Gold Coast.⁵¹ The British colonial government was now prepared to spend some amount of money to build railways in the colony. This also happened in other British West African colonies, such as Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The first practical steps in railway building in the Gold Coast were taken between 1892 and 1894. Pressure from merchants and traders made the Governor of the Gold Coast, Brandford Griffith recommend the appointment of Captain Lang to embark on a preliminary survey of the Gold Coast in 1892.⁵² It should be noted that Griffith in 1890 had already suggested the

⁵⁰ Tsey, *Gold Coast Railways*, 17.

⁵¹ Constructive Imperialism was Joseph Chamberlain's view of colonial occupation in the late 19th century. Joseph Chamberlain was the Colonial Secretary between 1895 and 1903. He believed that instead of plundering the colonies without any investments, he wanted Britain to consider the colonies' resources by making strategic investments like building railways to ensure the peaceful exploitation of the resources of the Gold Coast. According to him, railways facilitated trade, brought about employment for the local people, and made their lives more comfortable. This was a means of integrating a section of local society within the colonial system and preventing any serious protest against colonial rule. See Ukelina, B. U. *The Second Colonial Occupation: Development Planning, Agriculture, and the Legacies of British Rule in Nigeria* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), xxii.

⁵² Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude", 504.

need to build light railways from the main coast to the interior.⁵³ Interestingly, this move was supported by the colonial Office in December 1892 which thus appointed Lang as a surveyor.⁵⁴ The unfolding event within this period meant that the Gold Coast, and for that matter British West Africa, was ready to construct railways. Even though the British decided to build railways in the colony, there was the issue of where they would locate these railways.

It is worth mentioning that the government appointed a Committee on Economic Agriculture in 1889 that presented a report regarding the construction of railways. With this, there was a consideration of the laying of a short rail line of about four and a half miles between Axim and the mouth of the Ankobra in 1890. This was done purposely to demonstrate how the idea of railway construction would look like in the Gold Coast. A significant stride was made in September 1891 when Governor Griffith granted a full railway proposal which recommended the construction of a 300–400-mile network. The first phase of this project was to form a trunk route from the most central part of the Gold Coast into the interior. Significantly, the project provided the basis for financial return and formed a basis for future railway development in the colony.⁵⁵

Other proposals also followed in 1892 basically from Lord Gifford, Gower Sadd and Henry Cooper. Based on this proposal, the Secretary of State, Lord Knutsford concluded that even though the colony seemed not to gain anything from this proposal, it was time that steps were taken to decide on the kind of

⁵³ Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 28.

⁵⁴ TNA: C. O. No. 879, Manchester Chamber to Colonial Office, 20 Feb. 1893.

⁵⁵ Tsey, *Gold Coast Railways*, 19.

policy to be used for the building of railways.⁵⁶ This suggests that by 1892, the government had still not adopted a major policy for the building of railways in the colony. There was the issue of the kind of funds to be used to build railways. A decision was later made on whether to use private enterprise or public funds for the railway project. The media in the Gold Coast also advocated for the construction of railways in the colony. For instance, *The Gold Coast Chronicle* reported in 1893 that “a few lines to the interior would do the country more good than roads that cost a large sum of money to keep in a good condition.”⁵⁷

From this period, the government became committed to making funds available for a large-scale railway project in West Africa. For a viable railway project, Governor Griffith suggested that Captain J. I. Lang of the Royal Engineers who had the experience should be considered to undertake the project. Upon the recommendation, Lang arrived in the Gold Coast and immediately proposed a central trunk route as advocated earlier by Griffith. Here, he saw Kormanti, two and a half miles west of Saltpond as the best place so that the line will pass through the agricultural district of Nsuaem (Oda). This was strategically and geographically positioned to serve the oil-producing areas and as a converging point for branch rail lines to Asante and Eastern Akim.⁵⁸

Lang’s survey report was available in October 1894. It proposed two alternative routes: first, 65 miles to start from Kormanti to Nsuaem estimated to cost £296,180.00, and second, 26 miles from Apam, east of Saltpond to Nsuaem

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁷ Public Records and Archives Administration Department (Henceforth PRAAD), Accra, NP 93/8, *The Gold Coast Chronicle*, 18 Feb. 1893.

⁵⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/93, Governor Griffith to Secretary of State, 20 September 1893.

also to cost £255,816.00. Lang further argued that the project will yield returns because both lines will pass through very fertile and populated areas. A Westminster railway consultant, William Shelford who was appointed as a Consulting Engineer for all West African railway proposals was given the report to verify its feasibility due to his great experience in railway development in India and Southeast Asia. Shelford then recommended in March 1895 that the Apam-Nsuaem route be undertaken because it will be profitable.⁵⁹ West African Commercial groups followed up on these surveys and thus sent a delegation to the colonial office to expedite the project. The delegation argued that the project will boost British commerce, create employment, stimulate British industry, and also neutralize the French expansion in the region.⁶⁰ These arguments were basically to demonstrate the urgent need for railways as an essential tool for placing Britain at a level with other European nations in Africa. Interestingly, the above proposal goes a long way to support the argument that railways were not only built for the exploitation of resources of the Gold Coast but also to expand and consolidate colonial rule from the coast to the interior. In this regard, the proposed route was to link the Central, Asante Territory and Eastern Province under one unified British influence for easy administration so that the expansion of other European nations like France and Germany into these areas would be impossible.

⁵⁹ Tsey, *Gold Coast Railways*, 21.

⁶⁰ TNA (London): C. O. Print, Africa No. 464, Captain Lang's report with maps dated October 1894, and Shelford's report dated March 1895, enclosed in Crown's Agents to Colonial Office, 19 March, 1895.

The Beginnings of Railway Construction from 1895

Notwithstanding the political factor for the acquiescence, pressure from the British Chambers of Commerce, and some private firms in Britain compelled the government to consider constructing railways in the Gold Coast.⁶¹ Chambers of Commerce in Liverpool and Manchester had sent in petitions to the Colonial Office to emphasize the need for railways in British West Africa.⁶² Indeed, the Manchester chamber particularly expressed the fear of losing the colony because they believed without railways, trade could be diverted from the British into the French-held territories. This was expressed as follows: “Unless steps are taken, a large proportion of the trade now passing through British Colonies will be diverted to other routes, to the great injury of the Colonies themselves and of trade between them and the United Kingdom.”⁶³ The British merchants in 1883 had already proposed that building railways in the Gold Coast would culminate in the control of land outside the forts and castles.⁶⁴ The call for the construction of railways in the Gold Coast and other British West African colonies then gained momentum in 1895. However, railway promoters in the Gold Coast were more popular than in any other British West African colony mainly due to its enormous gold deposits.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 28.

⁶² See TNA (London): C. O. 879/38, Liverpool Chamber to Colonial Office, 29 Dec. 1892.

⁶³ TNA (London): C. O. 879/38, Manchester Chamber to Colonial Office, 20 Feb. 1893.

⁶⁴ TNA (London): C. O. 879/38, Memorandum of the Cape Coast Merchants, 26 April, 1883 Encl. No. 5, in Rowe to C.O., 19 May 1883. This was signed by both British and African merchants appealing to the government to build railways in the colony. However, this proposal was turned down by the Colonial Office as they argued that railway projects must be undertaken by the government rather than private enterprises. See also C. O. 879/38, Colonial Office to Rowe, 23 July, 1883.

⁶⁵ Omosini, “Railway Projects and British Attitude”, 505

Railway Policy Decisions of Governor William Maxwell

Joseph Chamberlain was appointed the Secretary for British colonies in July 1895.⁶⁶ And in the same year, Sir William Maxwell was also appointed the Governor of the Gold Coast.⁶⁷ Governor Maxwell's efforts and policies were instrumental in the development of railways in the colony. Chamberlain had a vision that facilitated British economic expansion. Omosini describes him as the Birmingham radical and social reformer, who was a strong advocate of the theory of developing the 'neglected estates' of the British Empire.⁶⁸ Chamberlain viewed British colonies in Africa as ones that needed systematic development. On the economic development of the colonies, Chamberlain maintains that:

if the people of Britain were not willing to invest some of their superfluous wealth in the development of 'their great estate', then he saw no future for such countries, and felt it would have been better never to have gone there.⁶⁹

He was particularly concerned about Britain's ability to match the rivalry brought by other European nations in Africa through railway innovation. In this regard, he argued that if the British were to survive the looming competition, then they must build railways to control hinterland markets and sources of raw materials. Chamberlain's advocacy at the time shows how railways became significant to the economic development of the colonies. Generally, Chamberlain's ambition of developing the British colonies made him act on the railway question in West Africa including the Gold Coast. His administration empowered the Governor of the Gold Coast to execute railway projects in the colony.

⁶⁶ P. Fraser, *Joseph Chamberlain, Radicalism and Empire, 1868 – 1914* (London: Cassell, 1966), 1 - 3.

⁶⁷ Tsey, *Gold Coast Railways*, 28 and 29.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Here, Kimble cites *The Times*, 24 Aug, 1895, see Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 29.

Governor Maxwell's appointment was crucial to British territorial expansion into the interior of the Gold Coast as his appointment saw a burgeoning stride in the construction of railways with the purpose of using them to bring Asante under strong British rule.⁷⁰ However, his economic policies also had a significant influence on his railway development in the Gold Coast. With the aim of promoting trade into the interior, Maxwell saw railways as indispensable. As a colonial report states:

The conditions under which bulky produce is transported from the interior to the Coast are such that, beyond a certain distance inland, products have no commercial value; a new producing sphere could be tapped if a railway of 50 or 60 miles in length were constructed, and trade could be further developed by the gradual extension of the line; it is therefore desirable to carry a railway inland from the place best adapted for development as a harbour.⁷¹

In line with the British colonial economic policy directives, the railway development was not going to be incomplete until it was linked to the construction of a harbour that would transport the goods overseas. This was purely an economic strategy that was meant to make the British to wholly control trade without any external interference from other European nations like France and Germany.

Despite this policy, no decisions were made on the particular routes for the railways as the issue was under consideration. Looking at the role railways were to play in the expansion and consolidation of colonial rule by linking the coast to the interior, the Colonial Office was taking time to examine how well to

⁷⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/95, Colonial Office instructions to Sir William Maxwell on appointment as Governor, 20 March 1895.

⁷¹ TNA, London, (Online), No. 189, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Report on Internal Communication, 1895, 32.

strategically position the lines so that the intended purpose of building the lines to protect their investment would be achieved. It should be noted that Captain Lang had already recommended a railway line from Apam after his survey of railway construction in the Gold Coast. Moreover, Accra was also under consideration because of its economic relevance. It was then reported that with the circumstances at hand, it was seemingly obvious that no estimates were done for any railway expenditure for 1896.⁷² The year was to serve as a period of practical railway decisions but not the commencement of railway construction. It is also clear that even though railway construction delayed in the Gold Coast, its policy was an embodiment of the railway policy decision for the British West African colonies.

As stipulated by Chamberlain, the colonial government was to fund the railway project in the colonies including the Gold Coast. With the government in charge of the project, railway surveys were carried out to commence railway construction. That is, in 1896, two railway surveys began in the colony, one from Accra to Kumasi through Nsuaem, and the other from Takoradi Bay to Tarkwa and were to serve the mining and timber areas. In reference to the 1895 railway policy, the government considered the selection of a suitable place for the construction of a boat harbour to complement the operation of railways.⁷³ The two railway surveys which were started in 1896 were completed in 1897. From this period, arrangements were made for the construction of a line from Sekondi to Tarkwa. This line was to pass through the mining and timber districts, and work

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ TNA, London, (Online), No. 220, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Report on Railways, 1896, 23.

commenced early in 1898.⁷⁴ That is, even though the surveys started in 1896, serious railway construction started in 1898 with the Sekondi-Tarkwa line as the first railway project in the Gold Coast.

In 1898, the government then passed a Railway Ordinance. Although nineteen Ordinances were passed that year, the most significant ones were of loans and railways.⁷⁵ The Railway Loan Ordinance vested power in the Governor to borrow £220,000 through the sale of inscribed stock for the construction and equipment of the Sekondi-Tarkwa rail line. The sinking fund was to begin three years from the first issue of stock. Out of this amount, a sum of £185,961 had been spent on the project by 31 December 1898.⁷⁶ The ordinance made it clear that railways were to be funded by loans from the British government in London. Other loans were also granted to complete the Kumasi line in 1903.

On the other hand, the Railway Ordinance provided for the establishment and maintenance of Government railways in the Colony. It provided for the acquisition and powers of entry into land. The Governor and Legislative Council were both empowered to make regulations for carrying out the provisions of the Ordinance, and various offences relating to railways were also created. The provisions of the above-mentioned Ordinance as to the entry on and the acquisition of land were amended and simplified by the Railway Amendment Ordinance.⁷⁷ With the enactment of the Loan and Railway Ordinances in 1898,

⁷⁴ TNA, London, (Online), No. 249, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Report on Railways, 1897, 19.

⁷⁵ TNA, London, (Online), No. 271, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Report on Legislations, and Travelling Commissioners, 1898, 15 & 16.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 16; TNA, (London) Online, No. 306, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Report on Expenditure, 1899, 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

the colonial government was then ready and poised for massive railway development in the Gold Coast in 1898.

It should be noted that the Sekondi-Tarkwa line was a three-foot-six-inch, single line that began in 1898 and was completed in 1901. By 1900, scarcity of labour retarded the progress of the Sekondi-Tarkwa railways, however, 254 miles had been constructed with £389,869 being spent on railways at the end of the year.⁷⁸ The following year recorded an increase in railway expenditure as plans were far advanced to construct other railway lines in the Gold Coast. The total expenditure on railways as of 31st December amounted to £767,501 11. *Id.*, as against £625,500 borrowed by the Crown Agents, and £142,001 11. *Id.* advanced by the Colony.⁷⁹ The Crown Agents as of 31st December had obtained advances amounting to £625,500, in anticipation of the raising of the authorised loan of £1,035,000 for the construction of the Tarkwa-Kumasi Railway; in addition to this, the Colony had advanced from General Revenue Funds the sum of £142,001 11. *Id.*, so that the total Loan Debt of the Colony at that date was £1,330,070 5 (£562,568 14. *id.* + £625,500 + £142,001 11. *Id.*). The availability of funds, labour and land culminated in significant progress in the construction of railways in 1901. Here, with the construction of 30 miles within the year, the Sekondi-Tarkwa line was completed and on the Tarkwa-Kumasi line, additional 15 miles of railhead were constructed beyond Tarkwa.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ TNA, London, (Online), No. 344, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Report on Expenditure and General Observations, 1900, 7 & 26.

⁷⁹ TNA, London, (Online), No. 375, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Report on Expenditure, 1901, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 & 36.

Railway construction in the Gold Coast significantly impacted the economy by facilitating the transportation of trade goods, mining materials and passengers. Such rapid development culminated in a considerable inflow of capital and encouraged a general increase in imports, which rose by about £1 million annually between 1898 and 1902. Indirectly, too, the mining boom had an important influence on the subsidiary services necessary for economic expansion in the Gold Coast.⁸¹ The progress that accompanied railways in the Gold Coast and the British idea of economic expansion gave an impetus for the massive development of other railway lines constructed in the colony in the 1900s.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that railway policy decisions and outcomes were significant in the expansion and consolidation of colonial rule in the Gold Coast. The colonial government between 1873 and 1893 engaged private individuals and entities to plan railway construction because it had no clear railway policy or scheme on which the administration depended for progress in building railways. The absence of a viable railway policy engendered the flooding of varieties of railway proposals from both private individuals and firms most of which were seen as unfeasible because of their financial constraints. Another issue of concern was the inability of the government to extend its jurisdiction beyond lands around the castles and forts. This was a crucial factor for the abysmal progress made by the government on railway building before the 1890s. With regards to the acquisition of lands, the colonial government was reluctant to

⁸¹ Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 30.

abuse the power the local chiefs had over their land and as a result, refused to grant railway promoters access to land that they had no authority over.

However, with the change of imperial policy towards developing colonial estates in the 1890s, railway construction in the Gold Coast received considerable attention. With this policy, infrastructural development such as railways was to help expand and protect colonial power in the Gold Coast. Four reasons have been given for the change of colonial policy and how it affected the construction of railways. The first reason was the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 that required European nations to engage in effective occupation when they secured colonies, and it was through this that such nations could be legally recognized as having control over colonies secured. Secondly, the change in imperial policy including railway policy was due to the appointment of ardent imperial expansionists Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary for the Colonies and Governor William Maxwell, Governor of the Gold Coast in 1895. Third was the pressure from the Merchant groups especially in Manchester and Liverpool after they had realized the economic importance of railways. Finally, the quest to protect the colonies against external invasion was key to the change of the imperial railway policy. Railway policy decisions and outcomes after 1893 which culminated in the enactment of the 1898 Railway Ordinance and the construction of the Sekondi-Tarkwa-Kumasi rail line, among others make it obvious that railways were built not only for the economic exploitation of resources of the Gold Coast but also as an efficient tool to place Britain in a better position to avoid any internal and external invasion so that it could compete with other European nations in Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

CONSOLIDATING COLONIAL POWER: RAILWAY AS AN EFFICIENT TOOL, 1893-1939

Introduction

The previous chapter explored railway policy decisions, outcomes, and funding in the Gold Coast between 1874 and 1901. This chapter explores railways as a political tool for consolidating colonial rule in the Gold Coast. The British policy of using railways to consolidate colonial power was clearly seen under Joseph Chamberlain's leadership between 1895 and 1903, and even during the period he had left West Africa. He believed that the economic development of these colonies basically depended on political stability. More importantly, he also believed that building of infrastructures such as efficient transport systems like railways and harbours was a means of achieving such stability. Railways to him were to play a very significant role in transporting soldiers to inland states and goods to the harbours for export overseas. According to him, this would go a long way to attract investors into the colony.¹ Even though Bekeh Utietiang Ukelina argues that it was the Great Depression in the 1930s and the postwar economic crisis in the 1940s which forced the British to move in the direction of Chamberlain's vision, the development of railways in the Gold Coast in the early 1900s demonstrates how Chamberlain's economic policy of building infrastructure shaped the British occupation in the Gold Coast.²

¹ D. Sunderland, 'The Departmental System of Railway Construction in British West Africa, 1895-1906', *Journal of Transport History*, 23, 2002, 87

² Ukelina, B. U. *The Second Colonial Occupation: Development Planning, Agriculture, and the Legacies of British Rule in Nigeria* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), xviii. David Low and John

Chamberlain's view of colonial occupation was termed constructive imperialism. Instead of plundering the colonies without any investments, he wanted Britain to take into consideration the resources of the colonies by making strategic investments.³ Such investments like building railways were ways of ensuring the peaceful exploitation of the resources of the Gold Coast. This is because railways facilitated trade and brought about employment for the local people and made their lives a bit more comfortable. This was a means of integrating a section of local society within the colonial system and preventing any serious resistance against colonial rule.

With the rules laid down at the Berlin Conference, the appointment of Chamberlain and Maxwell, and the awareness of how railways were crucial to the consolidation of colonial power, the British Colonial Office began to change its railway policy. The change in railway policy was evident in Lord Knutsford's letter to Governor Griffith which stated that the time had come for the government to take bold steps to adopt a policy to construct railways.⁴ The new policy was to usher in a revolution of railway construction to serve as a means of increasing and protecting colonial rule against any form of internal and external

Lonsdale describes the period between 1940 and 1960 as the "Second Colonial Occupation". They argue that the period marked a high point in the practice of colonial development in Africa and that "Colonies that had suffered many years of neglect were now seeing renewed efforts by both Britain and France to build infrastructure and prime the production sector." For more information, see D. A. Low and J. M. Lonsdale, "Introduction: Towards the New Order, 1945–63," in *History of East Africa vol. 3*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 26.

³ Ukelina, *The Second Colonial Occupation*, xxii. See also, Joseph Chamberlain, "Speech at Walsall," July 15, 1895, in Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 21.

⁴ Lord Knutsford was a British Conservative politician, best known for serving as Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1887 to 1892. See C. O. Print, Africa No. 451. Lord Knutsford to Governor Griffith, 3 May 1892. Cited in C. E. Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways: the Making of a Colonial Economy, 1879-1929." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1986), 20.

invasions. The chapter, therefore, explores how railway construction in the Gold Coast was used as a means of consolidating British political power. It argues that by the end of the 1930s, the massive construction of railways in the Gold Coast, and Asante with its accompanying development provided the British government with the opportunity to absolutely control these territories for eventual exploitation of resources to feed industries at home.

Railway Politics and the Consolidation of Colonial Power in the Western Province

The hegemony of the Gold Coast had been contested by European nations since the close of the sixteenth century when the trading monopoly of the Portuguese (the first Europeans to establish permanent settlement with the people of the Gold Coast in Elmina) came under serious threat.⁵ The presence of the Dutch on the coast in 1595 increasingly undermined the power of the Portuguese. The Dutch in 1637 captured Elmina and by 1642, the Portuguese had abandoned all their possessions in the Gold Coast to the newcomers. Other European powers, such as the English followed and scrambled for a place on the coast. By 1750, the same year the African Company of Merchants was formed, all European powers had withdrawn from the coast except the Dutch with their headquarters at Elmina, the Danes with their headquarters at Christiansborg, Accra, and the English with theirs at Cape Coast Castle.⁶

The Imperial Government first assumed control of the British settlements in the Gold Coast in 1821. The African Company of Merchants was dissolved,

⁵ Public Records and Archives Administration Department (Henceforth PRAAD), Accra, ADM 5/1/33, Annual Departmental Reports of the Gold Coast, 1937-38, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*

with its possessions vested in the Crown and placed under the government of Sierra Leone. Seven years later, the Imperial Government, however, considered a complete withdrawal from the coast and entrusted the government of the settlements in the Gold Coast to a committee of London Merchants.⁷ In 1850, there was the separation of British forts and settlements of the Gold Coast from Sierra Leone. The Dutch withdrew from the Gold Coast in 1872, handing over their possessions to the British. Two years later, Sir Garnet Wosley's successful Asante expedition brought the final separation from Sierra Leone.⁸ A conclusion was made on placing the government of the Gold Coast on a footing of efficiency, peace, and security. Finally, the colony officially came under British rule after a new Charter was issued on July 24, 1874, separating British settlements on the Gold Coast and Lagos from the Government of Sierra Leone. The Charter also constituted them into one colony called the Gold Coast Colony under a Governor-in-Chief and an administrator in Lagos.⁹ For easy administration, the Colony was divided into provinces.¹⁰

Even though the colony had officially fallen into the hands of the British, there was still the need to expand and consolidate colonial power. The building of railways was to help in facilitating this. It should be noted that the new railway policy from the 1890s placed railway construction in a new direction towards developing the transport network to serve the mining and agricultural areas. The policy was also to facilitate the movement of soldiers and administrators, who

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/34, Annual Departmental Reports of the Gold Coast, 1938-39, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

were also to help maintain the political stability required by the colonial authorities.¹¹ The construction of railways in British West African colonies including the Gold Coast was organized by the Crown Agents, a quasi-government organisation that had both public and private characteristics. These lines were built with loans that were to be repaid from the extra taxation generated from economic activities in the colonies.¹² The Crown colony railways until 1906 were constructed by the departmental system of construction rather than by government-employed contractors or private firms.¹³ With the departmental system of construction, the building of railways was done by the Public Works Department. However, David Sunderland argues that the term ‘departmental system’ was a misnomer.¹⁴ According to him, in theory, railways were built by the colony’s Public Works Department but in reality, the consulting engineers were basically the contractors of the project.¹⁵ Despite the above argument, the role of the railways’ department in the construction of the Gold Coast railways in the 1890s cannot be understated. The government’s Railway Department was involved in consulting engineers to carry out surveys and to eventually build the lines.

The consideration of building railways normally went through a long process. Practically, the consulting engineers were contractors of railway projects in the colony.¹⁶ After the Colonial Office had examined the options of

¹¹ D. Sunderland, “The Departmental System of Railway Construction”, 87.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ J. Kerr, *The Railways of the Raj, 1850–1900* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 65.

¹⁴ Sunderland, “The Departmental System of Railway”, 87.

¹⁵ Public Record Office, Kew, C. O. 147/172/42513, Colonial Office to Egerton, 6 January 1905, cited in Sunderland, “The Departmental System of Railway”, 87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

construction, the consulting engineers organised an inspection survey to establish possible routes. The consulting engineers relied heavily on the information collected to create designs and estimate the likely cost and economic feasibility of the project. Their report was usually passed to the Crown Agents, who were expected to add their own comments, and then to the Colonial Office, which decided whether the scheme should go ahead or not. If approval was given, the consulting engineers recruited a resident engineer and support staff, who travelled to the colony. There, directed by the consulting engineers in London, using indigenous labour, and until 1904 preceded by the location survey engineers, they carried out the work. On its completion, the consulting engineers then supervised the operation of the line.

Various decisions were made to ensure that lines were strategically positioned to serve the interests of the colonial authorities. One of the lines that engendered debate was the Sekondi-Tarkwa line of the Western Province. Both the economic and political advantages of the line were taken into consideration before it was sited. On the one hand, railway surveyors suggested that the line should take an eastern direction because of the economic advantages this would provide. A journalist at *The Railway Times* believed the line was in an area that was to be well furnished with water transport.¹⁷ The author again pointed out that it would favour mainly the gold mines. He also mentioned that others who suggested that situating it in the Western portion of the colony would serve resources like palm products, mahogany, cedar, gums, and gold. Nevertheless, the

¹⁷ *The Railway Times*, Railways in West Africa, June 20, 1896. In D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 26.

government acknowledged that mines needed the railway to develop. But a hidden consideration which did not initially come to mind was the political consideration.

The journalist highlighted the political advantages of building the line in the West. He noted in the article that “the urgency of supplying this want is insisted upon strongly, particularly in view of the fact that the Western Province is being ‘hemmed in’ by French aggression.”¹⁸ Even though the economic benefit of locating the line on an Easterly route was highlighted, the one compelling factor for siting the railway in the western part of the colony was political. The political consideration was necessary for economic exploitation. It was also important to safeguard the colonies from foreign encroachment.

Both economic and political advantages were considered and as such the line was located on the Western route. This demonstrates the nexus between the economic and political predisposition of railway construction in the Gold Coast. In this regard, while the railway line was to serve the exploitation of resources such as palm products, mahogany, cedar, gums, rubber, skins, ivory and gold, it was thought that building the line on the Western portion was a way of preventing the area from falling into the hands of the French. In this case, the economic and political advantages went hand in hand and without any of them, it would have been difficult for colonial economic policy to succeed in the Gold Coast. Railway surveys commenced in 1896 and were completed in 1897. Arrangements were made for the construction of the Western line from Sekondi to Tarkwa and work

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

began in early 1898.¹⁹ Regardless of the slow pace of work, the 40-mile line was completed in April 1901.²⁰ The strategic position of the Sekondi-Tarkwa line in terms of politics of the region makes it clear that railways in the Gold Coast were not only meant to exploit colonial resources but also to serve as an instrument of enhancing colonial political power.

Making the Rail Count: Railway Politics and its Impact on Colonial Power in Asante

One of the biggest and most highly developed ethnic confederations in the interior of the Gold Coast was the Asante Confederation. It was noted for its offensive and defensive abilities, and by the end of the seventeenth century, the confederation had begun to establish its ascendancy. The eighteenth century saw the consolidation of the military power of Asante and the growth of its magnificence.²¹ The increasing military power of Asante aimed towards the domination of the Gold Coast and consequently the British policy of protecting the coast states was the cause of continuous resistance to the Asante and of the various wars which took place during the nineteenth century.²² The Confederation throughout the 1800s fought serious battles with the British over its hegemony.

One of the maiden battles between the British and Asante was the *Battle of Insamankow* in January 1824. During this period, Sir Charles MacCarthy, the Governor of Sierra Leone commanded a punitive expedition against the Asante

¹⁹ The National Archives of the UK (Hereafter TNA), No. 220, London, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Railways, 1896, 19.

²⁰ TNA, London, (Online), No.397, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on the State of Railways and Roads, 1902, 55.

²¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/31, Annual Departmental Reports of the Gold Coast, 1935-36, 4.

²² *Ibid.*

with the aim of beating off an invasion. He was defeated and killed at Nsamankow. Two years later, however, the British fought the Asante in the Battle of Dodowa (also known as the Katamanso War).²³ Assisted by the levies of Akim, Akwamu, Denkyira and Accra, the British defeated and routed the Asante at Dodowa. Hostilities recommenced in 1873 and a year later, Sir Garnet Wolseley led an expedition against Kumase which he captured and destroyed. Peace then ensued until 1893 when the Asante again became active, breaking the provisions of the treaty which had been concluded in 1874. In 1896, another expedition was sent to Kumase and Prempeh, the King of Asante, and other notables were arrested and deported. A resident was appointed to administer the kingdom and a fort was constructed and garrisoned at Kumase to monitor the political developments in the area.²⁴

It is worthy of note that despite these battles, Asante, however, was not yet subjugated and in 1900 a demand by the Governor for the surrender of their Golden Stool brought them up in arms with the result that the Governor was besieged in the fort. Accompanied by a strong escort, however, he was able to make his way through to the coast and a military expedition was sent to Kumase which relieved the fort and broke up further resistance. Although Asante was annexed to the British Crown in 1901, the kingdom was still not peaceful.²⁵ There was the need to firmly consolidate and entrench colonial power to ensure peace,

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/33, Annual Departmental Reports of the Gold Coast, 1937-38, 5.

²⁵ Ex-King Prempeh was allowed to return to Ashanti in 1924 and two years later to assume the position of Kumasihene or Head Chief of the Kumasi Division. He died in 1932. See PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/31, Annual Departmental Reports of the Gold Coast, 1935-36, 5.

security, and prosperity in Asante. Railway was to play a key role in this regard in the succeeding years.

In 1900, the Colonial Office consulted Engineers to survey a suitable route for the construction of another line and they recommended that the line should be extended from Tarkwa to Kumase, the capital of Asante. Initially, there were no plans for the extension of railways to Kumase when the Sekondi-Tarkwa line was constructed. However, with the crucial role railway was to play in the expansion and consolidation of colonial rule into the interior of the colony, plans were made to construct a new line to link Kumase. Acting Governor Hodgson pointed out how the building of railways to Kumase could contribute to the peaceful annexation of Asante and bring it under British control amidst the political tension in the territory. He, however, recommended in 1898 that the line should rather start from Accra to Kumase. According to Hodgson, a railway communication from Accra to Kumase would ensure administrative and military expediency.²⁶ But the Engineers believed that linking it from Tarkwa to Kumase will serve the Obuasi mines and equally provide administrative and military benefits. By July 1898, their report was ready, and it recommended the extension of the line from Tarkwa to Kumasi. The reason for this decision could be attributed to the British annexation of Asante in 1895-6, the eventual introduction of metropolitan mining into the region and the quest to bring Asante under Britain's total control. In this instance, both the political and economic advantages of railways in the Gold Coast were also important.

²⁶ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/98, Acting Governor Hodgson to Secretary of State on Future Railway Development, 16 September 1898.

Building railways in Asante had far-reaching political consequences. Considering the political interest of the British in bringing the territory under their control, it will be easy to see why the railways were politically important. It should be noted that even though Kumase had been occupied and the King exiled since 1896, the British colonial government had not fully established colonial rule in the region. Different scholars have written about the invasion of Asante in the 1890s. Some of the writers who have examined this invasion are Francis Agbodeka, J. E. Ward and Ivor Wilks.²⁷ For instance, Agbodeka points out that the British imperial expansion in 1895-6 that went beyond the frontiers of the Gold Coast Colony was a direct response to the emerging Asante political and economic tactics which aimed at perpetually securing the independence of the Asante Empire.²⁸ The British saw that if they failed to act urgently, Asante's economic and military strategies would permanently shut them off from the interior. The annexation of Asante in 1895-6 was to make them occupy the area for the eventual establishment of colonial rule. In fact, the invasion of Asante provided the opportunity to invest in mining. From this period, the British sought to secure formal control over Asante because of its political and economic potential and they were looking forward to accomplishing this only through diplomacy.²⁹ Railways were therefore to play a vital role in this direction.

²⁷ F. Agbodeka, *African Politics and British Policy in the Gold Coast 1868 - 1900* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 147 – 155; J. E. Ward, *A History of Ghana* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965), 315; I. Wilks, 1998. “‘Unity and Progress’: Asante politics revisited”, *Ghana Studies* 1, (1998), 151-79.

²⁸ Agbodeka, *African Politics and British Policy in the Gold Coast*, 147 - 155. See also, Ward, *A History of Ghana*, 315.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

The reason for using railways to formally establish colonial rule in Asante was obvious. The Colonial office had become increasingly aware that the urgent construction of railways into Asante was expedient if the tenacious resistance of the Asante was to be crushed.³⁰ The initial step in the establishment of railways in Asante began in August 1898 when European firms in Obuase were calling on the colonial government to construct railways to serve their business. During this period, Fred Gordon, Chairman of Ashanti Goldfields approached the Colonial Office with a proposal recommending that the Sekondi-Tarkwa railway scheme should be transformed into a major trunk route to serve Obuase and offered to pay up to £5,000 for the survey.³¹ However, the Colonial Office did not accept the offer because no assurance was given.³² The following year, Gordon renewed his proposal to extend the Tarkwa railway to Obuase with a new offer aimed at bringing traffic on the line to cover capital charges for ten years.³³ The Chairman of Ashanti Goldfields put pressure on the government to construct railways in the interior of the colony. The colonial authorities also realized the urgent need for railways communication to Asante because it was critical for the total establishment of formal colonial rule in Asante. Even though Asante had been occupied by the British in 1896, the former had not been completely colonised by

³⁰ C. O. Africa, Print No. 578, Chamberlain to Crown Agents, 12 April 1900. Cited in Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways", 21.

³¹ C. O. Africa, Print No. 53, Fred Gordon to Colonial Office, August 1898. cited in *ibid.*

³² C. O. Africa, Print No. 531, Colonial Office to Ashanti Goldfields Corporation, 16 August 1898. In *ibid.*

³³ C. O. Africa, Print No. 578, Crown Agents Despatch on the matter, 13 February 1900. In *ibid.*

the latter.³⁴ The building of railways in Asante was therefore to make the establishment of colonial rule complete.

The extension of the line from Tarkwa to Kumase commenced in June 1901 and by December, 15 miles of railhead had been built beyond Tarkwa.³⁵ By December 1902, the line had reached Obuase and that of Kumase was completed by October 1903.³⁶ The completion of the Tarkwa-Kumase route brought the entire length of railways to 269 km (168 miles), that is, a 124-mile Sekondi-Obuase line and a 44-mile Obuase-Kumase line.³⁷ The construction of the Sekondi-Kumase line had political significance. In this regard, the whole line had 19 stations with the majority of them being set aside for military fortifications basically to defend and quell any attacks either from the Asante or the French.³⁸ By 1904, a first battalion and battery had been stationed in Asante, with headquarters at Kumase, and detachments at Accra and Cape Coast in the Gold Coast Colony for security purposes.³⁹ The contribution of railways to the expansion and consolidation in Asante was evident in the construction of the Tarkwa-Kumase route as the British wanted to formally colonise the region. This shows that railways in the Gold Coast were not only meant for the exploitation of colonial resources but also to expand and consolidate colonial rule in the interior

³⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/99, Acting Governor Hodgson to Colonial Office; 19 November 1899, c.o. Print, Africa No. 578.

³⁵ TNA, London (Online), No. 375, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on General Observations, 1901, 36.

³⁶ TNA, London (Online), No. 426, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on the State of Railways and Roads, 1903, 42 & 43.

³⁷ TNA, London (Online), No. 465, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Railways, 1904, 39.

³⁸ P. R. O., C. O. 46/400, Resident Engineer to Crown Agents, Fortification of Stations in Ashanti, 21 April, 1902.

³⁹ TNA, London (Online), Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Railways, 1904, 35.

of the colony. Moreover, the line again assisted in directing British administration in the colony. It linked various resource areas on the stretch together and helped to connect large resource areas of Obuase and Kumase bringing these areas under stronger British colonial control. The line unified the interior and increased trade to enhance the political administration of the area.

The Sekondi-Kumase line demonstrated the political benefits of the railways after completion. It also showed the nexus between the political and economic benefits of railways in the interior of the colony. The development of railways demonstrated the collaboration between the Asante Chiefs and the British government in Asante's politics in terms of the administration of the territory. The collaboration was in the form of the British system of indirect rule.⁴⁰ The indirect rule system ensured that the people were governed through their own traditional institutions with close supervision from the British government.⁴¹ Even though the government administered the Gold Coast, Asante and the Northern Territories through the Kings, Chiefs and traditional institutions, the real administration was modelled on the British form of governance. Such collaboration culminated in the increase and maintenance of British imperialism and the political power of the area.⁴² This made the British government more powerful than the chiefs as the former even made laws and tried cases in their courts.

⁴⁰ Agbodeka, *African Politics*, 166 – 168.

⁴¹ S. Ocheni, and B. C. Nwankwo, "Analysis of Colonialism and its Impact in Africa," *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 8, (3) (2012), 46-54.

⁴² Agbodeka, *African Politics*, 166 - 168.

The King and Chiefs who collaborated with the British government saw the political benefits of the construction of railways in the region. This was clear in the 1903 Annual Departmental Reports which mentions that:

Many Ashantis who had left their villages and settled in the Colony during the disturbances in 1900-1901, returned to their own districts; the population is settling down and becoming more prosperous. The Governor visited Kumasi in March and received the Kings and Chiefs, when various tribal matters in dispute were amicably settled. While evincing a not unnatural desire to get back some of their former power, no feeling of resentment is shown against the present administration. The War Indemnity Tax, which was reduced by one half in the preceding year, was abolished after the tax for 1902 had been collected. The first train on the Government Railway, run by the Construction Department, reached Kumasi on the 1st of October. The advent of the line is likely to have a great civilizing effect. Some of the European firms established on the Coast are engaged in opening branch stores at Kumasi. The cultivation of cocoa is receiving encouragement, and the rubber trade shows very satisfactory signs of improvement.⁴³

The building of railways became crucial for the administration of the colony and went a long way to entrench colonial power. The Sekondi-Kumase line brought relative peace which had eluded the people for a long time. In this context, the collaboration in the Asante politics that came as a result of railways development influenced those who were disrupted during the disturbances to return to Asante to live a peaceful life as the political atmosphere was satisfactory. A colonial report confirmed that the year 1903 was eventful in Asante and many people who fled Asante and settled in the colony during the disturbances of 1900-1901 returned to their own districts. The reason for this early calm was the effect of the

⁴³ TNA, London (Online), No. 426, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on General Observations, 1903, 41.

railway which made the population in Asante more prosperous where no feeling of resentment was shown against the colonial administration.⁴⁴

The connection between the political and economic benefits of railways became more evident in the subsequent years. The building of railways which brought peace and unity opened Asante for business and other economic activities. The construction of railways in Asante brought peace, law and order as mentioned by Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage. However, these impacts of railway construction were not to benefit the people of Asante but to consolidate colonial power and enhance the colonial enterprise of the British. Taxes were collected for the administration of the territory, and European firms also set up businesses to boost trade in Asante.⁴⁵ This was crucial to making the colony busy so that the colony could be maintained. For example, railways in Kumase were instrumental in the distribution of expatriate firms in Kumase and about eleven firms had been established by 1904.⁴⁶ In the succeeding years, other expatriate firms such as Bank of British West Africa, Ashanti-Obuasi Trading Company Limited, a subsidiary of Ashanti Goldfields Corporation started operations at Kumase, Obuase, Sansu and Akrokeri.⁴⁷ Both the political and economic advantages of railways in Asante complimented the British imperial policy of obtaining resources to feed their industries in Europe. The following years recorded peace and order, more activities, and development in Asante. But railway was also

⁴⁴ TNA, London, (Online), No. 465, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Ashanti, 1904, 37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/5, Chief Commissioner, Ashanti Report, 1905, 29.

⁴⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/6, Chief Commissioner, Ashanti Report, 1906, 19; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/6, Chief Commissioner, Ashanti Report, 1907, 23.

facilitating something more important. It was helping the interconnection between Asante and the Gold Coast Colony. The chiefs and elders of the two distinct areas were being brought together through railway transportation for administrative purposes. In the first half of 1904, almost all the Asante chiefs, except for Bekwae and Nkwanta chiefs, were taken to visit Sekondi by railway. This was to familiarize them with the benefits afforded for merchandise by rapid transit to the coast.⁴⁸ Indeed, the development of railways in Asante facilitated the British idea of ruling the two areas as a single territory. This was deemed as a pre-requisite of their quest to successfully obtain resources of the colony without much resistance from the people.

Looking at the location of railways in the Western Province and Asante, it is clear that the building of the lines was to serve the political interest of the British. That is, the lines served as a means of maintaining British power from Sekondi to Asante. Such strategic location of the lines gave the British government the opportunity to administer and strengthen their control over these areas against Asante and French invasion. The building of railways from Sekondi to Kumasi ushered in the beginning of formal British colonial control over Asante. This clearly demonstrates that railways were not only built for economic exploitation purposes but to also expand and consolidate colonial power from the coast to the interior. The completion of the Kumasi rail line strengthened British rule over the Asante and revived Kumasi as the administrative centre of the region. The control of the region enhanced the British imperial objective of

⁴⁸ TNA, London, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Ashanti, 1904, 37.

setting up the country for private business and effective colonial rule. The area became conducive for the implementation of colonial policies.

Politics of the Eastern Rail Line, 1904-1916

The completion of the Sekondi-Kumasi rail line was a great impetus to the eventual planning and construction of the Eastern railway. The impact of colonial railway development shows that railways and imperialism were intricately interwoven.⁴⁹ The location of the Eastern line affirms this assertion. The development of railways in the Gold Coast expanded colonial rule into the interior of the colony. The British believed that after the establishment of a colony, the development of infrastructure like railways would help to consolidate colonial power as well as to further direct administration. Railways then provided an efficient transport system, defence, and other means of consolidating power.⁵⁰ The location of the Eastern line was to play a significant role in this regard by bringing various towns and villages together and helping to unify these areas under a firm British control. The line was also to connect water bodies and link the interior with the harbour, and therefore aimed at monopolising the trade in these areas.⁵¹ In fact, the colonial railway policy in the twentieth century paved the way for the construction of a harbour, and took into consideration, the location of the lines to unify large resource areas of the colony.

⁴⁹ A. D. Bruckner, "To Develop the Colonial Estate: the Reasons for British West African Railways." (M. A. Thesis, the University of York, 2011), 23.

⁵⁰ See B. D. Clarence, and E. W. Kenneth, *Railway Imperialism* (London: Greenwood Press, 1991), 2-4.

⁵¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/4/4, General Schemes of Railways and other Works in the Colonies of Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Lagos, and Nigeria. June, 1900, 4 and 8.

Even though the location of the Eastern railway was economically motivated, that is to tap palm oil, rubber, and cocoa in the region, its political impact cannot be ignored. Politically, the railway policy that culminated in its construction was influenced by the different views of individual colonial administrators. Colonial records show that Acting Governors of the Gold Coast between 1898 and 1903, namely Hodgson and Sir Mathew Nathan made decisions that leaned toward the building of an Accra-Kpong railway.⁵²

This line which was to serve the oil palm-producing areas of Krobo, and Eastern Akwapim was to further enhance the movement of government supplies through the Volta to the Northern Territories. This was also intended to come along with Government Sanatorium and Botanical Station at Aburi. The governors argued that such a line will provide easy access from Accra so that they will be able to settle in the Aburi area and move to their offices in Accra daily.⁵³ Here, it is obvious that railways were not built only for the purposes of exploiting resources but for facilitating effective colonial administration. While the governors wanted to control the Eastern part of the country, at the same time, they did not want to set up administrative offices that would possibly move them away from the colony's capital, Accra, and thereby undermine their control over this region. The Accra-Kpong railway, then, was to become a means of easy movement basically for administrative purposes. In this regard, the idea of

⁵² See the following archival records for more information: C.O. Print, Africa No. 531, Acting Governor Hodgson's correspondence with the Colonial Office 4 May 1898, and 3 August 1898; TNA, London, (Online), No. Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports of Railways and Roads, 1903.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

politically linking the British stations on the coast to the bases of British power in the interior became obvious.

Another political advantage of this line was to serve the highly populated areas of the Eastern Province of the colony. This line was to be sited in one of the most densely populated areas of the colony, which had an average population density of 1423 persons per square mile.⁵⁴ Looking at the feasibility, of the political and economic advantages of the Accra-Kpong line, the Engineers argued that it was really promising.⁵⁵ It was an advantage for the colonial government to build railways through these areas so that it could control the lands and the people.⁵⁶ However, when the construction of the line began, Sir John Rodger replaced Sir Mathew Nathan as governor and halted the scheme.⁵⁷ Rodger proposed that the Accra-Kpong line should be abandoned and that a new one should be sited in a more northerly direction specifically, from Accra to Mangoase.⁵⁸ This he believed would serve the cocoa-growing areas as well as help control a new territory and avoid any rivalry within the Volta enclave.⁵⁹ He further argued that:

when dealing with the general question of transport in this Colony, we should, in my opinion, consider the sea as the main line of communication and endeavour to connect our coastal towns with the various planting and mining districts as many points as possible by means of rivers, roads and railways.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ TNA, London, C. O. Print, Africa No. 578, Crown Agents to Colonial Office (Forwarding Shelford's Report on the Proposed Railway to Kpong), 10 August 1899.

⁵⁵ TNA, London, P.R.O: C.O. 96/427, Consulting Engineers to Crown Agents, 18 April 1905.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ TNA, London, (Online), No. 488, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on General Observations, 1905, 37. See also TNA, London, P. R. O: C.O. 96/427, Governor Maxwell to Secretary of State, 15 October 1904.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ See Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways," 56.

⁶⁰ Governor Maxwell to Secretary of State, 15 October 1904.

A Loan Ordinance was passed in 1905 and it empowered the Government to raise the sum of £1,400,000 for the purpose of carrying on public works including the railway scheme. Railway building was marked as an important stage in the opening up of the Gold Coast Colony and its commercial development.⁶¹ A survey was conducted the same year and construction began in early 1909 a 40-mile eastern line started from Accra to Mangoase.⁶² With the significant role railways played in the expansion of colonial power, by 1916, the line had been extended by an additional 25 miles through Koforidua to Tafo, a major cocoa-growing town even when all railway projects during this period were suspended due to wartime limitations.⁶³ The perceptions of these individual governors over the location of the Eastern railways demonstrate the political consideration of railway development in the Gold Coast. In as much as the location of railways in well-resourced areas was a top priority, the power to fully control these areas was also considered in the railway schemes. It should be noted that the idea of strategically connecting the centres of British administration on the coast to the centres of British power in the interior was still clear in this scheme.

The aftermath of the building of these lines continued to demonstrate the political advantage as well as the relationship between the political and economic benefits of railways. Such benefits were important factors in the expansion and consolidation of colonial power in the colony. For example, the development of the cocoa industry as a result of the construction of railways in Asante and

⁶¹ TNA, London, (Online), No. 488, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on General Observations, 1905, 37.

⁶² PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/10, General Manager, Railways Report, 1910, 6.

⁶³ TNA, London, P. R. O., C. O. 96/562, Secretary of State to Crown Agents, 23 November 1915.

Eastern Province lines generated revenue for the administration of the colony. It should be noted that the colonial authorities charged a higher railway rate for the transportation of cocoa. For the colonial government to maintain the colony, the revenue of this indirect taxation was used to run the colony. Governor Guggisberg in 1923 pointed out the high railway tariffs on cocoa by arguing that the levies were fair means of taxation in generating revenue to maintain the colony.⁶⁴ Moreover, other traffic policies in the 1920s that protected railway transport against road transport demonstrate how the former was an essential source of revenue for colonial administration. The extension of railway lines generated substantial income for the colonial administration. Public revenues multiplied nine-fold in the 1920s, whereas government expenditure more than quadrupled at the same time.⁶⁵ The construction of railways did not only stimulate export production and create new markets for metropolitan products but also increased import and export trades. This brought considerable revenues for the administration of the colony. The revenue generated as a result of the construction of railways was very essential in maintaining colonial power in the interior of the colony.

The relationship between the political and economic benefits of railways in the Gold Coast was evident in how the lines helped in the expansion and delineation of territorial operations in the Gold Coast.⁶⁶ The Asante and Eastern

⁶⁴ Governor's Annual Address, Legislative Council Debates, 1923-5, 18. In R. D. Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: the Railway men of Sekondi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 234.

⁶⁵ Gold Coast, Treasury Reports, 1901-1926-27; Gold Coast, Blue Books for Relevant years; 1901-1928-29: Gold Coast Treasury Reports for the various years. Cited in *ibid.*

⁶⁶ A.G. Hopkins, "Imperial Business in Africa Part II. Interpretations," *Journal of African History*, XVII, 2 (1976), 267-290.

lines opened the country to European commercial activity. Railways contributed to the spread of the money economy into the interior of the country. To fulfil the condition of maintaining the colony (effective occupation), the building of railways provided a conducive environment for European firms to operate in Asante and the Eastern Province. The construction of the Mangoase-Koforidua-Tafo line also culminated in the penetration of European firms into cocoa-growing areas in the Eastern Province. For instance, by 1909, F. and A. Swanzy and two other European firms had branches at Nsawam. Other expatriate firms including the Bank of British West Africa also negotiated for building sites at major railway stations by 1909. European firms had been established at Koforidua, Kukurantumi, and Tafo by 1911.⁶⁷ The effective occupation of these European firms developed these areas into trading centres and went a long way to strengthen British colonial power in the interior. This became possible due to the construction of railways.

Railway Plans and Proposals in the Northern Territories

The Northern Territories came under British influence in 1897 after the conclusion of treaties with the chiefs concerned and after international settlement with France and Germany. The area was proclaimed a Protectorate in 1901.⁶⁸ The British occupied the Northern Territories immediately after the area was devastated by the slave-raiding activities of Samory and Babatu and other civil wars among the ethnic groups. These battles weakened the pre-colonial states and

⁶⁷ See PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/10, Commissioner, Eastern Province Report, 1910, 30; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/11, Commissioner, Eastern Province Report, 1911, 31.

⁶⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/31, Annual Departmental Reports of the Gold Coast, 1935-36, 5.

made it easier for British colonial control. Upon taking over the area, the most demanding consideration was the adoption of efficient measures to restore peace and confidence. The first major political change introduced by the British in the Northern Territories was to administer the area through the traditional authority. With a small staff and a large area to rule, the British realised the expediency of ruling through chiefs.⁶⁹

The continuous expansion of British colonial power into the interior of the colony also brought about the plan to consolidate imperial control over the Northern Territories. The proposal to build a 250-mile railway line from Kumasi to Tamale was to serve both the political and economic interests of the British. The intention behind the proposal to build railways in the Northern Territories also demonstrated the nexus between the political and economic advantages of railway development. The extension of railways to the Northern Territories had long been recommended by George Ekem Ferguson, a Fante official of the Gold Coast government in 1896. He suggested that the contour of the interior offers facilities for animal transport and railway.⁷⁰ In support of the Northern railway line, Lt. Col. Whittall, the Acting Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories maintained that following Northern Nigeria's example, the viability of the extension of the railway to the North may be enhanced if the people were encouraged to produce shea butter and groundnut oil near the proposed rail line

⁶⁹ N. J. K. Brukum, "The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast under British Colonial Rule, 1897-1956: A Study in Political Change." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1997), 8.

⁷⁰ K. Arhin (ed.). *The Papers of George Ekern Ferguson: a Fanti Official of the Government of the Gold Coast, 1890-1897* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1974), 99.

on a communal basis.⁷¹ Whittall then made a projection that the construction of the railway line to the North would cost £3,500,000. He further argued in favour of its cost-effectiveness that increased production of shea butter, groundnut, and livestock would make it possible for the rail line to start making profits in the first year of its existence.⁷²

Considering the political and economic advantages of railways in the opening up of areas in the Gold Coast and Asante, it would have been expected that railways will be extended to the Northern Territories as early as the beginning of the 1900s. However, it was not until 1922 that a survey was conducted to determine the feasibility of the Northern line.⁷³ Even though the failure of the Northern railway scheme has mainly been attributed to economic reasons, it is important to mention that political reasons also played a huge role in this. The Northern Territories had already been weakened by the slave prowling of Samory and Babatu and civil wars when it came under British colonial power.⁷⁴ The British colonial administration saw that it was necessary to restore peace and confidence in the area. The government then employed the services of the indigenous authorities and power holders in the administration of the territories.⁷⁵ Even though railways could have helped in the consolidation of colonial rule and restored peace in the Northern Territories as it did in Asante, the topography of

⁷¹ PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM 23/1/ 251, Central Province Railway, 1924, 29 - 30.

⁷² See PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/359, P. F. Whittall, 22nd September 1923.

⁷³ Despatches relating to the construction of a railway between Kumasi and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, Sessional Paper No. XIV, 1929 - 30. In Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways," 94.

⁷⁴ R. B. Bening, "Foundations of the Modern Native States of Northern Ghana" in *Universitas, Legon*, iv, 3 (1975), 118.

⁷⁵ Brukum, "The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast under British Colonial Rule", 7.

the area and the colonial interests required that power was vested in the traditional chiefs to restore calm and consolidate colonial rule. In fact, with inadequate staff and a large area to rule, the British realised the usefulness of ruling the Northern Territories through traditional chiefs. The expediency of using the chiefs was reported by Northcott, the first Chief Commissioner and Commandant of the Northern Territories as early as 1898. He mentioned that it would be necessary to employ the chiefs as the agency in ruling the Northern Territories and that their authority would be supported if they showed good behaviour.⁷⁶ This was one of the main reasons why the construction of railways was not considered in the early 1900s even when the coast and the interior were being developed and consolidated with the building of the lines. The British continued to consolidate the authority of paramount chiefs in the Northern Territories while reconstructing the kingdoms that had disintegrated for many years until the introduction of indirect rule in the early 1930s.

Another reason railways were not built in the Northern Territories was that the area was used as a labour reserve. As the demand for labour in the South increased, commissioners in the North were encouraged to provide labour for the South. As a result, developing the area like building railways will mean a cut in the supply of labour. For this reason, the colonial government became reluctant to develop the Northern Territories as it was seen as a threat to the supply of labour.⁷⁷ It should be noted that the Commissioner for the Northern Territories in 1906, sent men from the North to the mining districts in the South to be shown the

⁷⁶ Bening, "Foundations of the Modern Native States of Northern Ghana", 118.

⁷⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 56/1/5, Chief Commissioner, Northern Territories to Colonial Secretary, 3 September, 1907.

nature of work, rates of pay, way of life and the general treatment of the workers.

The government continued to embark on organized recruitment of labour from the North for the mines in which officials and chiefs played a major role.⁷⁸ Gordon

Guggisberg dwelt on the labour question to argue in favour of the abandonment of the Northern railway scheme. He stated that:

To encourage agricultural production in the Northern Territories by constructing a railway before the development of communications in the South would result in the greater part of this labour being lost. For the above reasons, I have deliberately sacrificed for the moment the development of the agricultural products of the North.⁷⁹

The focus of the Guggisberg administration in the 1920s was basically to address the labour question of the colony. Since the Northern Territories were the main source of labour to the colony and Asante, developing the area would have undermined any efforts to obtain labour to facilitate their exploitation of resources of the Gold Coast and Asante. For example, despite the difficulty in recruiting labour in 1922, about 2,524 boys were dispatched from the Northern Territories of which 2,231 arrived at the mines.⁸⁰ It is clear that even though the building of railways in the Northern Territories could have enhanced the consolidation of colonial rule in the area, the political atmosphere in the area made it necessary to confer power on the traditional authorities. Moreover, the building of railways could have also disrupted the labour supply that was needed for colonial business in the South. Therefore, by 1923, the scheme had been abandoned. Clearly, it

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ TNA, London, P. R. O: C.O. 96/612, Governor to Secretary of State, 14 March, 1924.

⁸⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/19, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Report on Labour, 1921-1922, 55.

could be seen that even though the proposal to build the Northern line took into consideration economic benefits, it also had some political significance. Because the construction of the line was seen as not politically and economically beneficial, the scheme was abandoned. This demonstrates how the relationship between the political and economic benefits of railways were considered in the location of lines in the Gold Coast. These were considered because the British administration believed that they would help increase their power in the colony.

Politics of the Central Railways in the 1920s

The government's attempt to extend its control over resource areas of the Gold Coast also brought to the table, the construction of the Central Railway line. It should be noted that this railway scheme came to mind after the Northern Railway line had been abandoned. An initial amount of £30,000 was earmarked for the survey which commenced on October 15, 1922, to determine the location of the Central Province railway route, and by the end of the year, they had surveyed 34 miles.⁸¹ A report on the survey was submitted in 1923, and it was proposed that the line should begin from Huni Valley which was 53 miles north of the Sekondi-Kumasi railway line. The line which was estimated to cost £1.6 million was to pass through the Central Province and cover a distance of 100 miles. This line was also to connect the diamond mines at Kade. The line was basically proposed to stimulate the production of cocoa, the major product of the area, palm oil, timber and kola.⁸² With the control over these resources of the

⁸¹ TNA, London (Online), No. 1207, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Railway Construction, 1922-1923, 45.

⁸² Gold Coast, Correspondence Relating to the Construction of the Central Province Railway, Sessional Paper No. 14 of 1922 - 23, (1923), 21.

area, it was believed that the British colonial government would be in the best position to strengthen its power against any interference from invaders.

The location of the Central Province railway line brought a series of interactions in the colony. The initial railway proposal was economically motivated. Various stakeholders had specific interests. One of the interest groups was the educated elites of Cape Coast. In November 1919, Honourable E. J. P. Brown made an address to the Legislative Council on transportation in the Central Province and complained that the proposed location of the line would ruin the booming trade in Cape Coast. He began his address by emphasizing the economic potential of Cape Coast and the need for a railway line. Brown mentioned that in the wake of economic development and the immense resources awaiting development in the province, it was right to give the people their share of infrastructural development like railways. To him, it was apt to locate a line through Cape Coast, the main centre of the province to its northern limit, if not to Kumasi.⁸³ He then acknowledged that the provision of railways was the work of the government. In Brown's argument, railways were understood mainly from the economic point of view. However, from the colonial government's perspective, railways were more than an economic stimulant. It was also a means to increase colonial authority.

There were other conversations with the Governor of the colony concerning the location of the Central Province Railway. On 20 March 1923, Governor Gordon Guggisberg received a deputation from the 'Omanhene' of

⁸³ PRAAD, Cape Coast. ADM 23/1/ 251, Central Province Railway, Honourable E. P. Brown's Address at the Legislative Council November 26, 1919, 14.

Cape Coast, Nana Mbra III. The delegation which comprised Tufuhene Coker, Mr. J. P. Brown, Chief Kweku Ahin, Kyiami of Cape Coast and Mr. W. S. Johnston, was to present a petition on behalf of the Omanhene to the governor with regard to the location of the Central line. The deputation presented a document dated 17 March 1923. However, it appears that the Omanhene's argument did not change the government's initial plan. The governor explained why it was not beneficial to build railways in Cape Coast at the time.⁸⁴

In the discussion, Guggisberg first explained that the decision to build the line from Huni Valley was influenced by the interest of the people up-country through whose districts the proposed Central Province Railway would have to pass. Secondly, he stipulated that it was financially prudent to locate the railway at Huni Valley. Thirdly, the decision to build the line with its base at Cape Coast would kill the commercial activities in Winneba, and Saltpond. Finally, he mentioned that he made the Central Province Railway decision on the advice of his experts. In fact, the deputation expressed satisfaction with the explanation given by the governor. He assured the deputation of a future discussion on the question of building railways in Cape Coast.⁸⁵ This meant that even though it was not economically prudent to build railways in Cape Coast in 1923, his assurance of a future discussion on that matter suggested that it would be economically profitable to build railways in Cape Coast in the future. It appears that the real reason for rejecting Cape Coast in favour of the Huni Valley was political. Since Cape Coast was already in the firm control of the government, rail was not

⁸⁴ PRAAD, Cape Coast. ADM 23/1/ 251, Central Province Railway, March 20, 1923, 1.

⁸⁵ PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM 23/1/ 251, Central Province Railway, Omanhene to His Grace, the Duke of Devonshire, London, May 12, 1923, 1.

politically expedient at the time. In making reference to the interest of the people in the area of the railway, the governor was thinking of the political effects of the railways as much as the economic ones.

Surprisingly, the governor's assurance of a future consideration of railways in Cape Coast was enough to satisfy the Omanhene and his people.⁸⁶ This assurance was also politically motivated because it was meant to instil hope in the people that the government would in the future consider their interest. It was also to maintain the cordial relationship between them so that together they could continue to administer the colony to the advantage of the British. The discussion between Guggisberg and the deputation also demonstrates the collaborative component regarding the administration of the colony. Here, it is clear that both the British government and local chiefs had a role to play in the location of the Central Province Railway. At the end of all the discussions, both parties were content with the decision to build the line from Huni Valley.⁸⁷ In as much as the government was keen on building railways to facilitate its colonial occupation, it was also a bit concerned about the interest of the people up-country through whose area the proposed Central Province Railway would have to pass. The government believed that if the people were considered in the building of the line, it will help solidify their control in the area that had enormous resources. It is therefore apt to argue that the effort to locate the Central Province railway was politically strategic in the sense that it was a way to consolidate colonial control over resource areas of the colony. Although the interests of the people in the area

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

were considered, the building of the line in the area was not to wholly serve the people but to make them content with its economic development and particularly strengthen their control so that they could effectively exploit the resources for the benefit of their economy. This supports the argument that the colonial occupation of the Gold Coast at the time was premised on the prioritization of the British economy over the economy of the Gold Coast and increasing colonial power with the construction of railways was key to achieving this objective.

Ormsby-Gore and Railway Plans and Proposals

Honourable W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore's visit to British West African colonies underscores the significance of both political and economic advantages of railways to the expansion of British colonial power in West Africa. Ormsby-Gore, M.P., under Secretary of State for the Colonies visited British Colonies on March 26, 1926, to survey the British occupation in West Africa so that he could see a general picture of the West Coast and its problems. Ormsby-Gore was accompanied by the Honourable C. A. U. Rhys, M.P., Mr. J. E. W. Flood and Mr. A. Bevir of the Colonial Office. They arrived in Accra from Nigeria on 20 March 1926.⁸⁸ Between 27 March 1926 and 11 April 1926, they toured the three Provinces of the Gold Coast, Asante and the Northern Territories to survey British occupation in these areas. A report of their visit to West Africa was presented to Parliament in September 1926 and was later published.⁸⁹ In their report, various

⁸⁸ See PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/3/24, Ormsby-Gore's Report, 1926, 5.

⁸⁹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/22, Annual Departmental Reports on General Situation in the Gold Coast, 1926-27, 11, and 12. "Between the 27th March and the 5th April Mr. Flood visited the Northern Territories, making a complete circuit from Kumasi via Yeji, Tamale, Navoro, Lorha, Wa, Kintampo, and Sunyani, and back to Kumasi, where he rejoined Mr. Ormsby-Gore. The latter with the remainder of the party motored on the 1st April from Accra via Aburi, Mampong, Koforidua and Kibi to Bosuso where they entrained for Kumasi. From the 3rd to the 6th of April

assessments and recommendations were made to enhance British colonial administration and control of the Gold Coast, Asante and the Northern Territories.

Ormsby-Gore in his survey of the Gold Coast wrote in his report that transport facilities were the pre-requisite to effective administration and commerce. He mentioned that it was the duty of the government to build this infrastructure.⁹⁰ This reiterates the argument that with the building of transport infrastructure, the government would have control over the areas and would also increase economic activities. He cited how the construction of railways from Baro on the Niger to Kano culminated in the control and expansion of cotton and groundnut markets⁹¹. With this example among others, he advocated for the construction of railways alongside the building of water and road transports. He reiterated the need to see these three systems in a holistic manner that is connected to the sea.⁹² He further suggested that railways must be built in rich resource areas, particularly cocoa-growing areas so that the British government could control both the people and the resources. Here, Ormsby-Gore stated that any project for a Western branch must commence from Kumasi in a north-westerly direction through an area where cocoa was developing.⁹³

The report also shows the need to build railways in the Northern Territories. Looking at the political and economic potentials of the area, he

Mr. Ormsby-Gore visited various places in Ashanti, and on the 7th and 8th journeyed by train to Sekondi, visiting the gold mines at Obuasi and Aboso and the manganese mines at Nsuta *en route*. On the 9th he visited Takoradi Harbour Works and the Seysie palm oil plantation, while on the 10th Mr. Rhys, Mr. Flood, and Mr. Bevir visited Cape Coast. On the 11th of April the whole party embarked at Sekondi for Sierra Leone.”

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24, and 25.

⁹¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/3/24, Ormsby-Gore's Report, 1926, 24 & 25.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

maintained that the Gold Coast could only develop wholly when railways to the Northern Territories had been constructed. That it was the duty of the Government to construct such a railway as soon as the financial situation permitted. With the construction of railways in the Northern Territories, Ormsby-Gore believed that the transportation of food and meat and the supply and mobility of labour would increase and be very cheap.⁹⁴ Even though no railways were built after this report until the Second World War, it is obvious railways were necessary in increasing British colonial power in the Gold Coast after the First World War. This was to make it possible for the British to control areas that had cocoa, minerals, manganese ore, timber, and other resources.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the development of railways was used as a tool to increase colonial power in the Gold Coast. It also examined how railway proposals and schemes for the building of lines in the Northern Territories and Central Province considered the accompanying political benefits. Moreover, the study highlighted the nexus between the political and economic advantages of railway development in the colony. The British government with a change of policy to suit its imperial objective embarked on massive construction of railways into the interior of the colony from the 1890s through to the 1900s. The political and economic advantages provided by railway development in Asante showed that the former was clearly a prerequisite to the acquisition of resources. The completion of the Sekondi-Kumasi rail line in 1903 served the political interest of the British in the sense that it was used as an instrument for maintaining British

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51 & 52.

autonomy from Sekondi on the Coast through Tarkwa to Asante. Such strategic location of the lines gave the British government the opportunity to directly administer the areas by binding various villages and towns together and helped to link Asante, bringing them under stronger British control. Railway stations on the Sekondi-Kumase line were also used as military control camps to strengthen their control over these areas against Asante and French aggression. The building of the Sekondi-Kumasi line ushered in the beginning of formal British colonial control over Asante. This clearly demonstrates that railways were not only built for economic exploitation purposes but to also expand and consolidate colonial power from the coast to the interior.

The Eastern line was both politically and economically beneficial. In this context, it opened up the country to European commercial activity. To fulfil the condition of maintaining the colony (effective occupation), the building of railways provided a conducive environment for European firms to operate in Asante and the Eastern Province. This was crucial to making the colony busy so that the colony could be maintained. Again, it should be noted that the construction of the Western line from Sekondi to Kumasi, and from Accra to Mangoase signifies the dominance of the political strategy that connected the bases of British administration on the coast to the bases of British power in the interior. It is worth mentioning that the prime objective of building railways in the Gold Coast was not to ensure economic growth for the benefit of the people of the colony but to create a certain political structure that afforded the British the authority to control the people, land, and other resources to enrich the economy of

Britain. In this regard, the chapter argues that by the end of the 1930s, the enormous construction of railways in the Gold Coast and Asante with its accompanying development provided the British government the opportunity to absolutely control these territories for eventual exploitation of resources to feed industries at home.



CHAPTER FOUR

'LOSS OF FAITH' IN THE COLONIAL ENTERPRISE:

RAILWAYS AND DECOLONISATION OF THE GOLD COAST, 1940 -

1957

Introduction

The previous chapter explored how railway development consolidated and solidified British colonial power in the Gold Coast. It was argued that railway development during that period in the Gold Coast was for political purposes, even though the economic motivation cannot be underestimated. Even though the railways constructed in the 1930s through to independence were not much, railways were still a potent political tool in the Gold Coast both for the British and the Gold Coast railway workers.¹ The impact of the Great Depression and the Second World War occasioned a change in the British economic policy and political upheaval in the wake of national consciousness because of the 'loss of faith' in the colonial enterprise.²

On the one hand, the change in economic policy as described as "the Second Colonial Occupation" by David Low and Johnson Lonsdale saw the government move towards Joseph Chamberlain's view of constructive imperialism.³ They described the Second Colonial Occupation as the period

¹ S. Hymer, "The Political Economy of the Gold Coast and Ghana." *Center Discussion Paper*, No. 73 (Connecticut, 1969), 24 and 25.

² H. J. Sharkey, *African Colonial States*. In J. Parker & R. Reid (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 168.

³ D. A. Low and J.M. Lonsdale, "Introduction: Towards the New Order, 1945–63," in *History of East Africa* vol. 3, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). This was cited in Ukelina, B. U. *The Second Colonial Occupation: Development Planning, Agriculture, and the Legacies of British Rule in Nigeria* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), xviii.

between 1940 and 1960 when Britain and France renewed efforts to build infrastructure and prime the production sector in colonies that had been neglected for years. On the other hand, the 1940s also gave birth to various nationalist political movements across Africa of which the Gold Coast was the leader. In the Gold Coast, railway workers were at the forefront of nationalist consciousness and radical politics.⁴

Drawing on these issues, this section focuses on the continual railway politics from 1940 to 1957 by both the British government and the Gold Coast railway workers. It specifically looks at how the railways, which had been used to entrench colonial rule, had been transformed into a political tool against colonialism. In this way, the chapter explores labour activism and radical politics by railway workers and how this worked against colonialism in the Gold Coast. This chapter argues that even though railways were used to consolidate colonial power in the first half of the twentieth century, they became a political tool which was used by the railway workers to fight against colonialism in the second half of the century.

The Railway Sector: Structures, Conditions, and Unions

The railway department which was under the Colonial Office was established due to the building of railways in the Gold Coast.⁵ The construction of

⁴ There were varieties of labour activism and radical politics after the Second World War. For example, Atbara, headquarters of the Sudan Railways, was a site of intense labour activism and radical politics. Another is the six-month-long strike by skilled Senegalese and Malian workers on the Dakar-Niger railway in the late 1940s. for more details, see J. A. Jones, *Industrial Labor in the Colonial World: Workers of the Chemin de Fer Dakar-Niger, 1881-1963* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002); A. A. Sikainga, *Transport Workers' Town: 'City of Steel and Fire': A Social History of Atbara, Sudan's Railway Town, 1906-84* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

⁵ D. Sunderland. "The Departmental System of Railway Construction in British West Africa, 1895-1906." *The Journal of Transport History* 23/2, 2002, 92.

railways in the colony demanded the recruitment of labour. The nature of railway construction required a lot of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, especially in the early years of railway development. People of southern Ghana (formerly, the Gold Coast) were unwilling to do unskilled labour for cultural reasons, they associated it with slavery.⁶ There was also no interest in it because of the low rates of wages. The colonial authorities, therefore, were also not interested in the forced recruitment of labour in the southern 'Colony' area.⁷ As a result, the labourers were forcefully recruited from the Northern Territories.⁸

Before the mid-1920s, that is, before the development of transportation and the cash economy extended deep into the hinterland, labour was basically 'induced' out of the north by the payment of 'conscience money' to the chiefs. Even though most of these workers from the north returned to the north once their term of service was completed, others ended up settling relatively permanently to work on extending, rerouting, or servicing the railway track.⁹ That is, some of them formed the bulk of the unskilled labour supply of railway workers. These workers were seen by the colonial authorities as reliable, strong, and fairly adaptable. It was not until the mid-20s onwards that the increasing desire and need of northern young men for cash in hand to purchase imported goods brought about an increase in the supply of voluntary labour.¹⁰ By 1927, men received an

⁶ R. Thomas, "Forced Labour in British West Africa: The Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906-27" *Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), 79-103.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, 12.

average wage of 1s. 6d. per day, and 1s. for women and boys.¹¹ Most of the workers attained supervisory positions (as gangers or track inspectors), and as such received stabilizing incentives in the form of pensionable status and incremental wage increases.¹²

Skilled and semi-skilled labourers were later recruited to manage the railway administration and locomotive workshops in Sekondi. Other skilled workers such as enginemen, maintenance fitters, crane drivers, signalmen and tug and launch crews were also recruited as harbour operators after the opening of the Takoradi deep-water harbour in 1928.¹³ The demand for labour, both skilled and unskilled, was very great throughout the 1930s. Most of these men were employed by the Public Works and Railway Departments. This suggests that the Railway Department had enough workers to carry out its operations. The wages of skilled artisans for example were from 3s. 6d. to 5s. a day. It was possible, however, for the best of them to become leading artisans or road overseers and earn as much as 10s. a day.¹⁴ In all, the Railway Department had a large number of skilled and unskilled labour that was basically drawn from the Northern Territories with some others drawn from other coastal towns like Cape Coast, and Elmina.¹⁵ These workers who would later become a force to be reckoned with in nationalist activities were mostly stationed in Sekondi.

¹¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/22, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Labour, 1926-27, 44.

¹² Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/22, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Labour, 1926-27, 44.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

As permanent workers, the railwaymen became increasingly conscious of their poor working conditions and as such formed an association that was to serve as a means of communicating their grievances to their employers. The jaundiced welfare decisions by the colonial government in 1918, that is, during the First World War pushed the railway workers to organize themselves to strike against what they regarded as discrimination. The year 1918 has been described as eventful as it recorded the first strike by the Gold Coast railway workers. The reason for this strike was the government's inability to give bonuses to railway workers after it provided a war bonus to European and permanent African staff in the civil service for their hard work during the war. The strike lasted for a week.¹⁶ Another strike also took place by the end of 1921. The management of the Railway Department during the 1921 strike failed to negotiate with them but a committee was set up by the government and a recommendation was made to increase wages for all government workers who had lower wages.¹⁷

Even though railway workers were at the forefront of strike actions in the late 1910s and early 1920s, it was not until 1928 that the Railways Workers Association was formed. The association was formed because of the poor working conditions of the railway workers. Therefore, the main objective of the association was to bring skilled workers together to address their industrial grievances. It also maintained the concerns of the defunct Workshop Association relating to the general social and cultural welfare of its membership.¹⁸ Before this

¹⁶ Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ An interview with H. B. Cofie, retired railway artisan, 5 June 1971. Cited in Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, 29.

period, workers in the railway workshops had formed the Workshop Association to mainly help workers adjust to unionised life in an industrial community in 1923. Membership of the association comprised craftsmen - gold- and silversmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters, and masons.¹⁹ The association provided different welfare services for their members. For example, the leaders planned for the provision of funds to members who needed to travel or meet expenses related to funeral and wedding ceremonies. The leaders sometimes assisted newcomers to the association to find accommodation. The association in 1926, made efforts to bring cinemas for entertainment purposes, however, like many other schemes, due to mismanagement, this attempt failed. There was no provision for regular dues collection to run the operations of the association, and meetings became increasingly irregular. As a result, the association collapsed at the time the latter group, the Railway Association was formed.²⁰

The Railway Association which was formed by skilled railway workers had J. C. Vandyck, H. B. Cofie, W. A. Adottey, H. Renner, F. H. Wood, S. W. Owiredu and J. Eshun as leaders. As part of the operation of the association, the leaders formed a Railway Workers Association Committee and began to integrate all the African artisans and apprentices at Sekondi into a single body. The key objective for the committee was to attain for themselves 'permanent' status, thus gaining entitlement to monthly pay and annual leave. They also began to extend membership to unskilled workers, to attain greater solidarity in case of threats of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28 & 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

dismissal.²¹ The nature of the association which later became a union made it easier for the members to express their concerns. The leaders of the association liaised very well with the members in terms of pushing their welfare concerns to the railway administration. For example, in the 1930s when the union could not be given official recognition because there was no legal provision for union registration, the association leaders assisted aggrieved groups of employees to draw up petitions to the management and were sometimes allowed to engage in the settlement of disputes on an informal basis.²² In April and November 1936, the Railway Association petitioned the Department to restore the 1929 rate of pay.²³ Although the actual request for a wage increment could not materialise, they hoped it could be granted in future. These strikes were indeed the beginning of the series of strike actions and demonstrations that made the colonial government unpopular and eventually became crucial to the nationalist activities and decolonization process in the 1940s and 1950s.

Indeed, the first recorded strike by railway workers in 1918 became a catalyst for other workers and unions to demonstrate their displeasure towards the colonial authorities through strike actions and demonstrations. Strike action was one of the political tools railway workers used to fight the inequalities of colonialism. History demonstrates that most Ghanaian workers from this period have attempted to express their displeasure towards poor working conditions in a bid to better their lot, especially at the workplace. In this regard, scholars such as

²¹ An interview with H. B. Cofie, retired railway artisan, 5 June 1971. Cited in Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, 29.

²² Railway Administration Archives (Henceforth RAA), Takoradi, General Manager to Colonial Secretary, 9 November 1938.

²³ *Ibid.*

Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, Kwamina Panford, Gerard Kester, Ousmane Sidibe, and Richard Jeffries have recounted the role of Labour unions in the improvement of the standard of living of their members.²⁴ The discontent of the workers has been demonstrated through strike actions and lockouts.²⁵ The demands (requesting bonuses as their European counterparts) of the workers were justified because they provided services which needed to be compensated in a form of wages and salaries. As Karl Marx stated, the wage worker offers his labour for sale so that he/she can survive.²⁶ That is, workers normally give their labour inputs in exchange for wages and salaries, and this serves as a function of what they receive. The agitations of the workers concerning their working conditions in the second decade of the 20th century were later to become a crucial component of the decolonisation process as these anxieties were ultimately channelled into the nationalist struggles in the early 1950s. This was due to the fact that the demands for better salaries, bonuses, and respect among others were not met and as a result, the workers deemed it necessary to fight colonialism- a system that had continually taken them for granted.

The Railway Association in November 1938 was renamed the Gold Coast Railway African Workers Union. The general manager of railways at the time explained that the union claimed to be the representative of the whole of the daily-rated staff of the railway, with delegates from all branches on the Committee.²⁷

²⁴ K. Adu-Amankwah, "The State, Trade Unions and Democracy in Ghana, 1982-1990" A research paper; Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*.

²⁵ Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ RAA, Takoradi, General Manager to Colonial Secretary, 9 November 1938.

The union continued to be a significant political tool that sharpened the national consciousness of key actors in the struggle for independence in the Gold Coast. Due to their constant agitations against poor working conditions and colonial rule, the nationalists saw them as conscious and ready to assist in the decolonisation of the country and as a result, brought them on board to help in the struggle for independence. This union represented the first significant expansion of official union membership in the Gold Coast although there were other strikes and labour organizations since the beginning of colonial rule.²⁸ Scholars like T. A. Ayoola, M. Mwaruvie, J. A. Jones, A. A. Sikainga, J. Msipu Phiri and others have shown how mobile railway workers in other African countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Mali, Sudan, Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) were at the forefront of nationalist political movements.²⁹ For example, the consciousness of the Senegalese and Malian railway workers culminated in a six-month-long strike on the Dakar-Niger railway in the late 1940s.³⁰ In Atbara, the headquarters of the Sudan Railways was a site of extreme labour activism and radical politics.³¹ Indeed, some may have succumbed to the careful scrutiny and management of railway worker welfare as in a South African case.³² Like the railway union in the Gold Coast, the highly politicized copper mine workers union in Zambia

²⁸ The Railway Union was essentially the creation of a dynamic, elementary school educated, labour elite of artisans. Unlike many of the so-called skilled workers in the mines and other industries, these artisans were genuinely highly skilled, many having been sent abroad for training. See Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, 33; Kimble, 44.

²⁹ See the following works on nationalist activities of railway workers in Africa: J. A. Jones, *Industrial Labor in the Colonial World: Workers of the Chemin de Fer Dakar-Niger, 1881-1963* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002); A. A. Sikainga, *Transport Workers' Town: 'City of Steel and Fire': A Social History of Atbara, Sudan's Railway Town, 1906-84* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

³⁰ Jones, *Industrial Labor in the Colonial World*.

³¹ Sikainga, *Transport Workers' Town*.

³² Tayler, "Combating unfavourable conditions", 107-25.

(Northern Rhodesia) radically fought the racially instituted copper mines in the region through strike actions.³³ The Northern Rhodesian Mine Workers' Union (NRMWU) battled against the Copperbelt's two main mining houses namely Anglo-American and Rhodesian Selection Trust. By confronting the racism that reflected in their poor working conditions, the workers fought the system that made their standard of living poor. The economic and political struggles of the Zambian mine workers were very significant in ending the job colour bar.³⁴ These class struggles served as an impetus to the radical politics of the railway workers on the Gold Coast. African railway workers in all its facets including constructors, drivers, stokers, signalmen, clerks, passenger dining-car chefs and sleeping compartment 'bedding-boys' were crucial in the radical politics that pushed for independence.

The high cost of living in the Gold Coast, discrimination, and segregation, pushed the union to petition the government through the General Manager of Railways. The union then became a highly political tool for addressing their concerns. The leaders of the union declared a strike action in a bid to better the working conditions of members of the union. In May 1939, the union secretary, J. C. Vandyck informed the general manager of railways that they would not return to work until the authorities had recognised the union as the body to which all matters affecting the interest of individual workers in their employment have to be referred. The manager's reply that the laws did not recognize the union pushed

³³ J. Msipu Phiri, "How Race and Law Influenced Activities in Northern Rhodesia," *African Identities* 17:3-4 (2019), 310.

³⁴ I. Phimister, "Workers in Wonderland? White Miners and the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, 1946-1962," *South African Historical Journal* 63:2 (2011), 183.

the workers to continue the strike which resulted in the arrest of some members.³⁵

The 1939 strike pushed the Labour Department which had been set up a year earlier (1 April 1938) to adopt measures to address labour conditions and problems. The Labour Department was established due to the labour unrest in the 1930s.³⁶

Methods of labour reconciliations were also considered by the Labour Department. Schemes were prepared for the methods of conciliation to be adopted in labour disputes and the possibility of using the machinery provided by native customs for collective bargaining and the expression of grievances. The Department moreover made provisions for labourers to submit any complaint they may have through their chiefs or tribal headman. It was considered that an advantage should be taken of this custom by the appointment and recognition of tribal headmen in the mining areas. The Gold Coast Chamber of Mines readily agreed to the proposal and by the end of the year, ten companies, comprising the majority of the large mining undertakings, had established the system.³⁷ In the context of the Second World War, the Labour Department had received instructions from London to adopt measures that will guard against the possibility of friction between employers and workers in the colony. All British colonies also received the same instructions.³⁸ Regarding the instruction and the idea of protecting colonial occupation, the Labour Department saw it necessary to control labour unrest. It is worth noting that the 1939 strike chalked recorded strides

³⁵ RAA, Takoradi, Vandyck to General Manager, 15 May 1939.

³⁶ PRAAD, Accra, CSO 716/33, Colonial Secretary to Secretary for Native Affairs, 2 October 1937.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/76, Macdonald to Colonial Secretary, 16 January 1940.

which were to some extent an improvement in the workers' condition. They had the Department restore the 1929 pay rates and increase the annual leave and the number of pensionable posts. However, their request for payment on public holidays was turned down.³⁹ The workers depended on their unresolved issues in the 1930s to be more radical in their demands in the 1940s and 1950s.

Railway Workers, Radical Politics and Ghana's Independence

The turn of events in the 1940s was a matter of concern to the workers. The economic crisis brought about by the Second World War worsened the hardship of the people of the Gold Coast and caused the railway workers to fight for two things. Here, they agitated for their welfare on the one hand and against colonialism on the other hand. In an interview with an ex-railway worker, he explained that:

Life under colonial rule in the 1940s and 1950s was very difficult for the people of the Gold Coast. Railway workers in Sekondi-Takoradi were suffering: their wages were low and for a very long time, the government could not do anything about it. They made several efforts to get the government to address this issue but that did not work.⁴⁰

Colonial authorities made various efforts to maintain colonies for their own benefit. The constraints of the Second World War produced a very challenging economy. In this regard, the colonial administration found it difficult to meet its financial obligation. Consequently, the government was forced to reduce public spending so as to meet the cost of administration. The period was marked by scarcity of consumer goods and an astronomical increase in prices. The lack of industries in the colony which culminated in the shortage of goods made the

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ An interview with Mr James W. Andoh, 82 year old ex-railway worker on 7 November 2021 at Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana.

people of the Gold Coast depend on goods imported from the mother country.⁴¹ Under this condition, the British administration had the power to influence the prices of raw materials produced in the Gold Coast.⁴² This consequently made prices of goods expensive for the ordinary worker. It moreover made the colonial authorities create and control more markets for their own benefit. The challenging economy during this period also affected the wages of workers badly. Under this circumstance, real wages compared to an index level of 100 in 1939 dropped to sixty-six in 1945 and recovered only to eighty-six by November 1947 but fell again to seventy-five in August 1948.⁴³ The situation kindled labour unrest involving twenty-six different industrial concerns, leading to the call for the boycott of European goods in 1948.⁴⁴

There was severe mass discontent about the working conditions of the Gold Coast labour force and the high cost of living. The railwaymen became extremely conscious of their deplorable working conditions, especially in the 1940s. The cost of living differed significantly in different parts of the Gold Coast but tended to be higher in the coastal towns. The cost of a labourer's food, for example, varied from approximately 3d. per day in the Northern Territories to 10d. per day in the larger towns in the south.⁴⁵ Even though wages were poor, the cost of living was very high. Besides the cost of living, there were other social

⁴¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/35, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Economic Development, 1947, 7.

⁴² A. Howard, "When the People Decide: A Study of the Independence Movement in Ghana". *African Diaspora ISPs*. Paper 41, 1991, 5 and 6. http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/african_diaspora_isp/41

⁴³ F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 249-50.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/34, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Wages and the Cost of Living, 1938-39, 71.

problems which agitated the workers. For example, black people were not allowed to enter some places in Sekondi and were also not allowed to swim in the sea whenever the white people were swimming.⁴⁶ It is quite clear that the railway workers became aware of the effects of colonialism on them and the people of the Gold Coast at large.

Although the railway workers demonstrated their displeasure before the Second World War through strikes and demonstrations, it was not until after the war that their agitations became radical and contributed to the decolonization process of the Gold Coast. The railway workers never ceased to negotiate, strike and demonstrate against decisions that militated against their welfare. Their strikes and demonstrations became more violent and crucial to the agitations against colonial rule in the 1940s and 1950s. This became possible due to the backing from the Colonial Labour Department, and the considerable expansion of official union membership. The membership increased from 500 registered members in 1943 to 6,000 in 1945, and then to 38,000 by 1949.⁴⁷

Gold Coast Railway African Workers Union members were at the forefront of the unrest in the 1940s and 1950s. It is worthy to mention that the railway union consistently exhibited extraordinary and outstanding commitment towards fighting for their welfare and against colonialism. Their unalloyed devotion and contribution to the decolonisation process were unmatched by any

⁴⁶ An interview with John Narh Nyakeh, 75 year old ex-railway worker on 6 November 2021 at Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana.

⁴⁷ Gold Coast (later Ghana) Labour Department, *Annual Reports*, 1951-67. In J. I. Roper, *Labour Problems in West Africa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), 107.

other union in the Gold Coast. In the midst of the first groups of workers to unionise in the 1920s, the railway union with its unparalleled prominence singlehandedly sustained their association on an active ground in the inter-war period, embarking on a number of effective and radical strike actions.⁴⁸ The union continued with a very radical political leadership in the decolonization process and that made it stand out among the other unions. Although other unions such as the Teacher Unions and Mine Workers' Unions remained confrontational towards the state when their material conditions worsened, their tension reduced anytime their working conditions improved.⁴⁹ The Teacher Union for example embraced different forms of protest such as petitions, deputations, and lobbying to make demands for better conditions.⁵⁰

The railway union was quite different in approaching the colonial government concerning the welfare of members because it was consistent in agitating against poor working conditions. Unlike other unions with internal wrangling, financial ineptitude and lack of responsible leadership, the railway union's unparalleled character against the effects of colonialism and colonial domination that contributed to the nationalist struggle could be attributed to three main reasons.⁵¹ First, the colonial administration's consistent failure to settle agreements made with the railway union in 1929, 1939, and 1941 played a key role in their consistent unrest against the government. Anytime the railway union

⁴⁸ Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana*, 1.

⁴⁹ K. Asiedu-Akrofi, *School Organization in Modern Africa* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Company, 1978), 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ For more information on the issues of other labour unions, see PRAAD, Kumase, ARG. 1/8/47 Colonial Report on the Labour Department for the year 1946 – 47; PRAAD, Sekondi, WRG 24/1/344, Telegram from His Excellency the Governor to the Commissioner of the Western Province, Sekondi, 26 November 1941.

had to stage a strike action, it was basically because the government had not fulfilled its promise to pay their bonus and increase their wages or rates among others. The leaders led their members to exhibit their discontent through strikes in 1918, 1921, and 1939 because they believed that was the only way to get the government to act towards fulfilling its promise and improving their welfare. The workers had to do this in the 1940s and another one in 1950 to indicate that they were fed up with colonial domination. The effects of the Second World War worsened the situation and paved the way for the railway workers to contribute to the nationalist struggle.

Second was the exposure of the railway workers to foreign education, conferences, and their responsiveness to issues in the union as a result of this exposure. The distinguishing characteristics of the railway workers enabled them to be receptive to nationalist ideas. Most of the skilled railway workers had some level of education and possessed essential organizational skills. Due to these qualities, the workers had access to political news, and ideas, as published in the newspapers and pamphlets. Their exposure to foreign education made the workers become politically conscious and as a result read books on Marxist ideas, and other nationalist movements in Asia and other areas in Africa such as Senegal, and Northern Rhodesia. An ex-railway worker explained how their exposure to education made them courageous in the demands for better working conditions:

The Sekondi railway workers union leaders were very educated and because of this, railway workers always went to them to complain about their poor working conditions. The leaders because of their education were courageous and brave and

sometimes confronted the leaders of the railway department to address issues of the workers.⁵²

The contribution of Marxist leaders of the railway union such as ex-locomotive driver Pobee Biney, Turkson Ocran, Anthony Woode and J. S. Annan cannot be underestimated.⁵³ With Marxist ideas, the economic structure at the time altered their human consciousness to contribute to the nationalist struggle. After attending the 1945 World Federation of Trades Unions Conference in Paris, J. S. Annan, a member of both the Railway Union and TUC Executive Councils demonstrated his commitment towards the fight against colonialism with the following words:

I believe that the time is now ripe when organised labour in the Gold Coast should commence to struggle against economic and socially militating forces: there should be no room for fear: we know these reactionary forces - the might of Imperialist Capitalism that has exploited the working-classes for years must be stayed. Let me say, however, that our struggle is not only against foreign capitalism and merciless exploitation - it is also against unbridled Capitalism of our own people, the Africans: we do not intend to remove foreign Capitalism that exists to make excessive profits at the expense of African cheap labour and put similar Capitalism in black skin.⁵⁴

Their consciousness was towards self-government, that is, a government by and for the people of the Gold Coast. The railway workers also had knowledge about United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill's 1941 Atlantic Charter that emphasized self-

⁵² An interview with Mr Isaac Benyah, 78 year old ex-railway worker on 6 November 2021 at Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana.

⁵³ R. Sandbrook and J. Arn, "The labouring Poor and Urban Class-formation: A case of greater Accra" *Monograph Series*, 12, (1977), 86.

⁵⁴ J. S. Annan's report to the Railway Union Working Committee.

determination, the right of all peoples to form their own government under which they will live.⁵⁵ The ex-railway worker again explained that:

Unlike other skilled workers in the mines and other industries, railway workers were active, elementary school educated, labour elite of artisans, who were frankly highly skilled. Most of them had the opportunity to be sent abroad for training. This was possible because the Railway Department had a far more progressive policy towards developing its skilled workers than did the mining companies.⁵⁶

With their level of education, exposure and consciousness, the workers became very responsive to demands for improvement of their working conditions and to eventually end colonial domination.

The third reason was the personal leadership and membership qualities of the railway union: their courage, and solidarity. The railway workers realized the importance of unity in the nationalist struggle. Their high level of confidence and a sense of unity strengthened their nationalism against the colonial administration. The courageous leadership of ex-locomotive driver, Pobee Biney and other workers was a clear manifestation of the politicization of the railway union towards improving their standard of living and ending colonial domination.⁵⁷ Their shrewdness and the courage to act boldly in challenging the colonial authorities paid off in the fight against colonialism.

The 1941 labour strike by the Railway workers was very critical to the demand for the implementation of the agreement made in 1939. The demand of the workers was for the colonial administration to fulfil the agreement made in

⁵⁵ B. Davidson, "The Second World War, 1939-1945," *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History*, (1994), 64 & 65.

⁵⁶ An interview with John Narh Nyakeh.

⁵⁷ Sandbrook and Arn, "The labouring Poor and Urban Class-formation", 86.

1939 because it had failed to honour its promise. The 1939 agreement was to restore the 1929 pay rates and increase the annual leave and the number of pensionable posts. The strike was embarked upon by the Artisans and labourers of the Railway Department in the Western Province: Takoradi and Sekondi basically due to the government's failure to implement the 1939 agreement.⁵⁸ The workers were sure that the only means to make the government implement the agreement was through strikes. It seems the rate at which the government failed to fulfil the agreement made it too clear to the workers that the government had no respect for them. With the nature of the colonial administration and workers' conditions, it is not surprising that railway workers played a significant role in nationalist movements that fought colonial rule.

The effect of their agitation was the appointment of I. G. Jones, a former official of the British Union of Mineworkers to address their concerns.⁵⁹ He was tasked to organise or reorganise Ghanaian unions in a way that was suitable to the government. He was also to instruct the local unions to follow certain proper procedures. Jones set out to reorganise trade unions in the Gold Coast with the intention that it would lessen the demands of the workers and keep them away from directly approaching the government when the need arose for negotiations.⁶⁰ Some of the procedures for the reorganization in 1942 had already been laid down in February 1941. The Government had already issued a Trade Unions Ordinance that permitted the amalgamation of five or more persons. It consequently issued a

⁵⁸ PRAAD, Sekondi, WRG 24/1/344, Telegram from His Excellency the Governor to the Commissioner of the Western Province, Sekondi, 26 November 1941.

⁵⁹ E. A. Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Trades Union Congress, 1960), 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

series of legislative orders that were modelled mainly on equivalent wartime measures in the United Kingdom. These orders significantly defined a 'trade dispute', the proper settlement procedures, and the circumstances in which strike action was not legal. The exact order that referred to railway workers was the Trade Union (Gold Coast Railway African Employees' Union) Order in Council, 1943.⁶¹ It should be noted that the Labour Department had specified that industrial disputes be settled through the local chiefs and elders in the Native Councils. Nevertheless, the railway workers instantly objected to the idea, and in agreement, the Labour Department suggested that the Provincial Council of Chiefs should act as a mediating body.⁶² However, the mediating body could not address their concerns.

The railway union continued to be used as a political tool to get the colonial administration to address their concerns. Jones through the colonial government's idea of legitimate trade unionism decided to draw the attention of the unionists to the objective of trade unions. Railway workers who were seriously hit by the high inflation and falling levels of income decided to press the government to fulfil the 1941 agreement. It was during this struggle that Pobee Biney emerged to galvanize the support of the workers to better their working conditions. Biney was just a branch representative for the enginemen on the Working Committee in Takoradi. This mobilization would later become crucial to the 1947 strike action that sought to get the government to fulfil the 1941

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15-19.

⁶² An interview with H. B. Cofie, 5 June 1971 cited in Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology*, 40.

agreement.⁶³ The Labour Department in 1947 was basically to offer assistance and advice to the workers and employers, to promote good relations between them, and to provide information regarding all matters affecting labour. More importantly, the Department was charged to encourage and assist in the development of responsible trade unions and to mediate all disputes between employers and employees.⁶⁴ Despite the above-mentioned functions of the Labour Department, it failed to address the concerns of the workers who had been hanging for about six years. The failure made the 1947 strike action imminent, and it became the only way to get the government to address their concerns. The failure of the government to address their concerns indeed demonstrates the gross disrespect the colonial administrators had for the workers of the Gold Coast. The discontent resulted in the workers' massive support given to Nkrumah's Positive Action which was crucial to the nationalist agitations against the exploitative tendencies of colonialism.

The strike action took place on 2 October 1947. As mentioned earlier, the strike action was a result of the unfulfilled promises by the government in 1941 coupled with the devastating effects of the high inflation. In fact, all workers were hit by the hardship in 1947. Pobe Biney who had the courage and tenacity mobilized and led the aggrieved workers to redress their concerns. His shrewdness and other qualities made him popular in the quest to get the government to fulfil its promise. The workers liked him for his idealistic nature

⁶³ See Wudu, *A Fallen Labour Hero of Ghana*, 5; Railway Administration Archives, G. N. Burden to Korsah Committee, 20 February 1947.

⁶⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/35, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Occupations, Wages, and Labour Organisation, 1947, 19.

and tended to believe that he could lead them for their concerns to be addressed. The distressed railway workers mobbed him anytime they sighted him. The workers would inform him of their grievances. In all these, they were highly positive that their petition was in capable hands. At times, they would travel to his residence from the farthest railway station to present their case and seek advice.⁶⁵ The contribution of Biney was crucial to the foundation of the nationalist struggle as his mobilization instilled confidence in the people to fight for what belonged to them.

The workers continued to show their displeasure towards their conditions of work and the high cost of living even after 1947. The workers together with Pobee Biney, clerical unionist, and Frank Woode, general secretary of both the Railway Union and the Trade Union Congress in 1947-9 pushed the government to reduce inflation, to ensure better living for the employees. It was through the radicalism of these leaders that they got connected to the nationalists. Specifically, Frank Woode criticized the government of depriving trade unions of their powers and further reiterated the need for these unions to be politically active in the legitimate quest for self-determination.⁶⁶ These concerns went a long way to also challenge the legality of the colonial government structure and played a significant role in Ghana's independence struggle. With solidarity from the workers, Biney led gatherings to communicate their grievances and most of these rallies were to demonstrate their radical nationalism. In these gatherings, the ill-

⁶⁵ F. Wudu, *The Man Pobee Biney: A Fallen Labour Hero of Ghana* (Accra: State Publishing Corporation, 1968), 5.

⁶⁶ Railway Union Archives, Sekondi, Railway Union Executive Council Resolutions, 23 April 1949.

of colonialism on the basis of its economic exploitation and damning impact on traditions and social relations were criticized.⁶⁷ The workers were still discontent about their situation and the disrespect accorded them in the midst of a high-inflation economy. The line of their agitation made it obvious that they were not only concerned about their working conditions but also about the system that brought hardship, exploitation and the destruction of traditions and culture that was detrimental to their identity. They became increasingly aware that colonialism was not meant to make them better off but to destroy both the natural and human resources of the Gold Coast. The contribution of Pobee Biney and other members of the union to the nationalist struggle was in a form of making the people of the Gold Coast conscious of the ills of colonialism and the need to end colonial rule. The hardship the people of the Gold Coast went through and the rising workers' unrest, and the agitations for improved working conditions dispel the notion by Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage that colonialism sought to develop African societies.

The Role of the Railway Workers in Nkrumah's Positive Action

The labour activism of the aggrieved railway workers in the late 1940s was translated into radical politics in support of Nkrumah's Positive Action in 1950. The CPP's "Positive Action" led by Kwame Nkrumah was a peaceful action that comprised a series of demonstrations, strikes and rallies that sought to push the colonial government to yield to the demands of the people of the Gold Coast for self-rule. Angela Howard mentions that the approach of the Positive Action of nonviolent non-cooperation was modelled on the philosophy and

⁶⁷ Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology*, 52.

practices that Mahatma Gandhi used to fight for independence in India.⁶⁸ The railway workers had experienced the devastating effects of colonialism and therefore gave impressive support to the action. The declaration of the Positive Action was preceded by a call for a general strike by the Trade Union which was dominated by the railway workers. Biney and Woode called on the railway workers to strike on 7 January 1950 and the following day, Nkrumah declared the “Positive Action”.⁶⁹ The connection between the leadership of the railway union and Nkrumah and the dates set for the strike and declaration of the “Positive Action” was very strategic as they were meant to destabilise the colonial administration. The strike commenced in Sekondi, the headquarters of both the harbour and railways. Indeed, the strike complimented the declaration of the Positive Action, and the railway workers knew that the strike was actually a radical political activity that sought to fight colonial rule and eventually bring about self-rule. Evidence shows that it was not until consultations with the leaders of the railway workers union (Biney and Woode) that Nkrumah declared the “Positive Action”.⁷⁰ Nkrumah was said to have been on the verge of negotiating with the colonial government and this explains his reluctance to declare the action initially.⁷¹ The Colonial Secretary, Reginald Saloway also confirms the reluctance of Nkrumah to declare the “Positive Action” by stating that “Nkrumah publicly called off the ‘Positive Action’, and tried hard to get the Trades Union Congress

⁶⁸ Howard, "When the People Decide", 14.

⁶⁹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/38, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Occupations, Wages, and Labour Organisation, 1950, 8.

⁷⁰ An interview with Godwin Coffie, 81 year old ex-railway worker on 7 November 2021 at Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

to call off the general strike, but the TUC no longer had any control over the wild men.”⁷²

The inability of the Trades Union Congress to stop the railway workers from striking was a clear indication that their anger towards colonialism could not be controlled. It is therefore right to say that their uncontrolled action in support of the “Positive Action” could be termed as a wildcat strike. The pressure mounted on Nkrumah by the wildcat strikers to declare the “Positive Action” shows the significant role the aggrieved railway workers especially their leaders played in the radical politics that culminated in self-government in the Gold Coast.

The workers’ pressure on Nkrumah to declare the “Positive Action” was evident at the rally ground at the Polo Park on 8 January 1950. On that day, Nkrumah and Pobee Biney stood on the same platform, but the former was hesitant to declare Positive Action. As Nkrumah addressed the people, Pobee Biney kept hitting him from behind and telling him in Fanti that, if he fails to declare the Positive Action, he will rather do it himself.⁷³ On account of this pressure, Nkrumah had no choice but to declare that the country was going to embark on a Positive Action.⁷⁴ Nkrumah who led the declaration and other key supporters of the strike were convicted of inciting an illegal strike and sedition and were then thrown into Ussher Fort Prison in Accra.⁷⁵ Indeed, the railway workers’ contribution to the “Positive Action” was decisive in obtaining self-government in 1951. Their determination in the strike was obvious and amidst the

⁷² R. Saloway, “The New Gold Coast”, *International Affairs*, 32, 4 (October 1955), 471.

⁷³ Howard, “When the People Decide”, 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/39, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Political Developments, 1951, 3 and 4.

intimidation from the clerical staff to disrupt the strike, some passionate railway workers resisted them. The strike continued until it ended on 20 January 1950 when vigorous efforts had been made to persuade the unions to reorganise in a more responsible way. By the end of the year, these efforts had resulted in the re-establishment of a Trades Union Congress with a new constitution, based on wider and more democratic representation than that of the previous Congress.⁷⁶ In an interview with Godwin Coffie, an ex-railway worker, he clarified that:

The railway workers became happy in the aftermath of the declaration of the Positive Action because they believed that due to the widespread of the strike action, the government would be pushed to address their working conditions. The role of the railway workers played a very significant role in making colonialism unpopular because the workers since the 1920s had demonstrated their displeasure against the colonial authorities and their maltreatment of colonial subjects. The strike action in 1950 in fact put fear in the colonial authorities and made them aware that the end of colonialism was imminent.⁷⁷

It is obvious from the role of the railway workers in the strike that the development of railways that was used as a tool to consolidate colonial power was the same tool used to fight against colonial rule.

In the aftermath of the 1950 strike by the railway workers and the declaration of the “Positive Action”, the Gold Coast for the first time recorded some significant strides which ultimately became the basis for independence in 1957. There was an outstanding importance in the field of political development in the Gold Coast specifically in December 1950 when the new constitutional instruments were published. The significance of these instruments which took

⁷⁶ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/38, Annual Departmental Reports on Occupations, Wages, and Labour Organisation, 1950, 8.

⁷⁷ An interview with Godwin Coffie, 81 year old ex-railway worker on 7 November 2021 at Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana.

effect on 1 January 1951, was based on the fact that, under the new constitution, the Gold Coast enjoyed a greater measure of responsible government than was enjoyed by any other African colonial territory. The new constitution came into force and by the end of 1951, it was seen to be working very well.⁷⁸ One essential feature of the new constitution was the greatly enlarged legislature, whose membership was increased from 31 to 84. It included, for the first time, representatives of the Northern Territories, elected by the Northern Territories Council, and, in addition to the members elected by the traditional Councils and the Southern Togoland Council and the four municipalities, other members were popularly elected by constituencies covering the whole of Ashanti and the Gold Coast Colony. The new Legislature which was called the Legislative Assembly was to elect its own Speaker. More importantly, there was also the composition of the new Executive Council which was to be the principal instrument of policy and contained eight Ghanaian Representative Ministers appointed from the Legislative Assembly. The 1950 Departmental Report of the Gold Coast clearly stated that the new constitution placed in the hands of the people of the Gold Coast a large measure of responsibility for the government of the country. This increased representation in the Assembly to such an extent that the whole country was to be fairly represented.⁷⁹ These, among other political developments, signified that the quest for self-rule was yielding profits and that the independence of Ghana was imminent.

⁷⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/39, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Political Developments, 1951, 3.

⁷⁹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/38, Annual Departmental Reports on Occupations, Wages, and Labour Organisation, 1950, 3; *ibid*, 3.

Efforts were made through democratic means to place the country in the hands of the people of the Gold Coast. Detailed plans were made for the holding of the first general election, which was due to take place in February 1951. The plans included proposals for the reform of local government submitted by the committees of the Legislative Council and Northern Territories Territorial Council which had worked out in greater detail the broad recommendations contained in the Coussey Report.⁸⁰ Although Nkrumah was in prison, his party, the Convention People's Party had built up an effective party organisation and had gone ahead to win 34 of the 38 seats which were contested on a party basis. Another party won three seats and the other seat went to a person without party affiliations. The Governor then remitted the remainder of Nkrumah's sentence of imprisonment, and he was able to take his seat when the Assembly opened. Several of his supporters who had been convicted of similar offences were released at the same time.⁸¹

All the members of the new Legislative Assembly were present when its first meeting opened on 20 February 1951 and in the subsequent days, the Governor held discussions with the leaders of the various groups in the Assembly and with Nkrumah whose advice was sought on the choice of Ministers. When the Assembly met again on 26 February each name in the Governor's list of persons proposed as Representative Members of the Executive Council was approved in the Assembly by secret ballot. Of the eight Representative Ministers, six were members of the Convention People's Party. On the following day, Nkrumah was

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 5/1/39, Gold Coast Annual Departmental Reports on Political Developments, 1951, 3 and 4.

elected by the Executive Council to be the Leader of Government Business and the Assembly was adjourned for six weeks to enable the new Ministers to take up the reins of office and for the new members of the Assembly to study the draft budget.⁸² The new Assembly had a fair representation of the people of the Gold Coast and this development was possible after the Workers' strike and the declaration of the Positive Action. Significantly, out of the eleven portfolios of ministers, ten were people of the Gold Coast. The Ministers and their portfolios at the end of the year were as follows:

The Hon. R. H. Saloway, C.M.G., C.I.E., O.B.E., (ex-officio Minister)—Defence and External Affairs.

The Hon. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah—Leader of Government Business

The Hon. P. F. Branigan, K.C. (ex-officio Minister)—Justice

The Hon. R. P. Armitage, C.M.G., M.B.E., (ex-officio Minister) —Finance

The Hon. K. A. Gbedemah—Health and Labour.

The Hon. A. Casely Hayford—Agriculture and Natural Resources

The Hon. Kojo Botsio—Education and Social Welfare

The Hon. E. O. Asafu-Adjaye—Local Government

The Hon. J. A. Braimah—Communications and Works

The Hon. T. Hutton-Mills—Commerce, Industry and Mines

The Hon. Dr. Ansah Koi, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.—Housing and Town and Country Planning.⁸³

The Assembly continued to meet to make decisions on the budget, and the Development Plan, and debated the new Local Government Bill. The Local Government Bill, which was passed into law, was designed to revise completely the system of local government throughout the Gold Coast except for the five principal towns, for which there was and continued to be separate legislation. The Ordinance was also both comprehensive and detailed and it proved possible to assimilate almost entirely in the Ordinance the local government bodies for the

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Colony, Asante, and the Northern Territories. Basically, its main feature was the provision of two levels of local government—District Councils and Local, in some cases Urban, Councils whose membership was in each case in the proportion of two-thirds elected by universal suffrage and one-third appointed by traditional bodies. Careful enquiries were being held at the end of 1951 in the area of each new local government body to ascertain whether the proposals were acceptable to the people of the area.⁸⁴ For the first time, most decisions regarding the governance of the Gold Coast were made by the people of the Gold Coast and it really shows that the agitations of the railway union members had yielded very significant results.

Conclusion

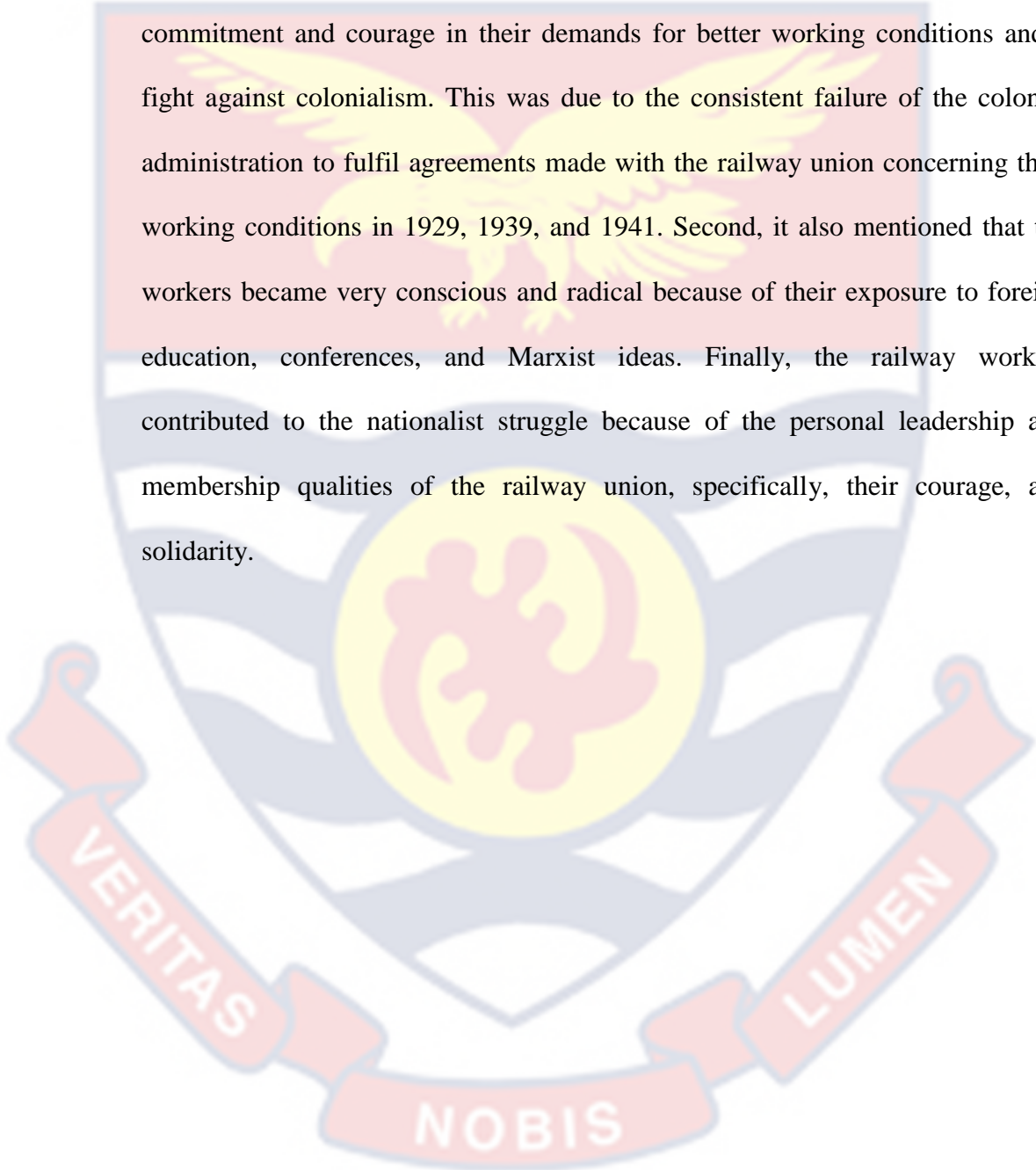
The main contention of this chapter has been that railway workers contributed significantly to the rise of radical nationalism in the Gold Coast. The chapter has shown how the failure of the colonial administration to fulfil the agreements made with the railway workers culminated in a series of strikes and demonstrations that eventually ended colonial rule in the Gold Coast. The initial demands of the railway workers throughout their agitation against the colonial administration were to get the government to increase their wages and reduce inflation and ensure better living conditions for the employees. It has also been demonstrated that in the aftermath of the Second World War emerged various discontents and accompanying radical politics and labour activism from the people of the Gold Coast, specifically the aggrieved workers of the Railway Union. The dissatisfaction of the local people emanated from the devastating

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 and 5.

economic effects of the Great Depression and the Second World War. The impact of these historical events made colonialism more exploitative in the sense that the colony was often manipulated by the mother country to enrich its economy. Such manipulations and exploitations eventually translated into high inflation, lower income earnings and high cost of living. The poor working conditions in terms of poor wages coupled with the high cost of living paved the way for the railway workers to contribute to the nationalist struggle.

With very courageous leaders like Pobee Biney and Frank Woode, the Gold Coast Railway African Workers Union became a very significant political tool that supported the national political activism of Nkrumah's "Positive Action" in the struggle for independence of the Gold Coast. The bravery, consistency and radicalism of the leaders and members of the Railway Union became obvious in their agitation for good working conditions. The workers' full support for the 1950 strike and the declaration of "Positive Action" yielded very positive results in the political history of the Gold Coast. The significant landmark in the political and constitutional development of the Gold Coast in the form of the setting up of the first Ghanaian Government brought independence even closer. But for the courage, consistency, radicalism, and agitation of the leaders and members of the Railway Workers' Union against the damages of colonialism, the independence of the country would have taken a long time. It is obvious that the tool (railway development) used by the colonial authorities to consolidate colonial power was the same tool used by the Railway Workers to overthrow colonial rule in the Gold Coast.

Three major reasons have been given for the determination and courage of the railway workers that contributed immensely to the nationalist struggle. First, the chapter has explained that the railway workers demonstrated great commitment and courage in their demands for better working conditions and a fight against colonialism. This was due to the consistent failure of the colonial administration to fulfil agreements made with the railway union concerning their working conditions in 1929, 1939, and 1941. Second, it also mentioned that the workers became very conscious and radical because of their exposure to foreign education, conferences, and Marxist ideas. Finally, the railway workers contributed to the nationalist struggle because of the personal leadership and membership qualities of the railway union, specifically, their courage, and solidarity.



CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The thesis has examined the politics of railways in relation to the activities and interests of the British colonial government and those of the railway workers in the Gold Coast from 1874 to 1957. It has explored the contradictory role railways played in the colonial endeavour of the Gold Coast. The thesis has explained how the policies and building of railways by the British government were used as tools to consolidate colonial power in the Gold Coast. It has also elucidated how African railway workers capitalized on the railway labour issues and the exploitation of imperialism to fight colonialism in the Gold Coast. The fundamental concerns of this thesis were to (a) explore railway policy decisions and outcomes of the British colonial government in the Gold Coast; (b) examine the extent to which railway development in the Gold Coast was used to consolidate colonial rule; (c) explore the nexus between the political and economic predisposition of railway development; (d) analyse the contribution of railway workers to the nationalist political movements in the Gold Coast in the 1940s and 1950s.

Thus, the study proceeded in its narrative by examining the colonial government's railway policy decisions and outcomes and funding in the Gold Coast between 1874 and 1901. The fundamental argument that was made in the examination was that the British colonial government in the early years of colonialism in the Gold Coast had no clear policy or scheme which guided the administration in the building of railways before 1893. As such, the government

engaged private individuals and entities to plan railway construction. One underlying reason for the failure of the government to have a clear railway policy was the issue of funding. Between 1879 and 1893, the colonial government believed that as had been done in other places like India, railway construction was an economic activity that should be carried out by private entities. In this regard, the government had the idea that the construction of railways in the Gold Coast must be done with private capital so that revenues from taxes would be used later to cover the cost. Although railway building needed extensive surveys to determine the nature of railways to be built and their location, the government during this period had not done enough surveys to have much knowledge about the economic resources of the colony. The possibility of getting knowledge about the colony was a challenge because no extensive geological maps existed at the time and that made the development of railways difficult in the Gold Coast. So, the government with its skepticism about the success of colonial occupation in the early years of colonialism was reluctant to look for funds to complete the railway project.

With the idea that private entities would play a significant role in the project, the government received varieties of proposals from private bodies. However, it rejected all the proposals for three reasons: first, all the schemes required a government guarantee of interest on the capital outlay. However, the Colonial Office was reluctant to introduce the guarantee system into the Gold Coast as they believed the days of guarantees were gone. Second was the issue of securing land for the project. Railway speculators were looking for free grants of

land along the proposed routes, with rights to trade, cultivate and mine but that did not lie in the power of the Colonial Office to make land grants outside the immediate vicinity of the coastal forts and castles. Regarding the acquisition of land, the colonial government was not prepared to abuse the power of the local chiefs over their lands and as a result, refused to grant railway promoters access to lands that they had no authority over. Finally, the Secretary of State wanted to make agreements with responsible people who could show that they could undertake the project and give security for their performance. Nevertheless, the government believed that the various promoters did not have enough backing from private capital to merit serious consideration to undertake the railway project. It is worth noting that the failure of the colonial government to have a clear railway policy and its reluctance to look for funds to undertake the projects accounted for its abysmal performance in railway development in the Gold Coast between 1874 and 1893.

Railway construction in the Gold Coast received considerable attention when the colonial government changed its imperial policy towards developing colonial estates in the 1890s. With this policy, infrastructural development such as railways were to help expand and protect colonial power in the Gold Coast. Four reasons have been adduced by this thesis for the change of colonial policy and how it affected the construction of railways. The first reason was the Berlin Conference of 1884-5. The conference required European nations to engage in effective occupation when they secured colonies. It was through this that such nations could be legally recognized as having control over colonies secured.

Secondly, the change in imperial policy including railway policy was due to the appointment of ardent imperial expansionists Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies and Governor William Maxwell, Governor of the Gold Coast in 1895. The appointment of these officials changed the railway policy narrative. The colonial government at this time had come to the realization that there was an urgent need for an efficient transport system that could transport the rich natural and agricultural resources of the Gold Coast to Europe. At the same time, the government also needed this transport system to consolidate colonial power so that it could efficiently carry out its business. Joseph Chamberlain with the idea of constructive imperialism recommended that for the government to consolidate power and benefit from the rich resources of the colony, it needed to make key financial investments including railway investment. Instead of private individuals taking the lead in railway construction, Chamberlain believed that railway development in British West Africa must be seen as an economic activity for the state. Considering the idea of Chamberlain and Maxwell, this thesis has advanced the argument that not only was the government interested in using railways to exploit the resources of the Gold Coast but was also concerned about the possibility of using it to consolidate power for easy resource exploitation. For example, investing in the colony was indeed key to having access to land- as the control of land was critical to the success of British colonial occupation in the Gold Coast. This was evident when the government was able to secure land for the building of railways after the appointment of Joseph Chamberlain and William Maxwell.

Third was the pressure from the Merchant groups especially in Manchester and Liverpool after they had realized the economic importance of railways. Finally, the quest to protect the colonies against external invasion was key to the change of the imperial railway policy. Railway policy decisions and outcomes after 1893 which culminated in the enactment of the 1898 Railway Ordinance and the construction of the Sekondi-Tarkwa-Kumase rail line, among others make it obvious that railways were built not only for the economic exploitation of resources of the Gold Coast but also as an efficient tool to place Britain in a better position so that it could compete with other European nations in Africa.

With the government's idea of consolidating power, this thesis has explained how railway development served as an efficient tool to achieve this objective in the Gold Coast and Asante. The political advantage of consolidating colonial power brought by the construction of railways was a prerequisite to the acquisition and exploitation of resources of the Gold Coast. For example, the construction of the Sekondi-Kumase and Accra-Mangoase rail lines was used as an instrument of maintaining British autonomy from Sekondi on the Coast through Tarkwa and Asante. The strategic location of the lines gave the British government the opportunity to administer and connect various villages and towns together and helped to link Asante, bringing them under stronger British control. Railway stations on the Sekondi-Kumase rail line were also used as military control camps to strengthen their control over these areas against Asante and French aggression. This created a political structure that made the administration

of the Gold Coast easier and gave the British colonial authorities the power to control the people, land, and other resources to enrich the economy of Britain.

The Sekondi-Kumasi railway according to the 1903 colonial report also brought relative peace which had evaded the people for a long time. The good relationship between the government and the chiefs was crucial to the former's control over land and the subsequent exploitation of the resources in the Gold Coast and Asante. Moreover, the 1903 colonial report also mentioned that the collaboration between the British government and the Asante Chiefs in the governance of Asante boosted trade, mineral, and agricultural exploration, and made the colonial government even more powerful in the early 1900s. That is, the Asante chiefs became content with the development brought by railways and as a result, were not hostile to the activities of the government.

It is noteworthy that this thesis has argued that there was a clear nexus between politics and economics in the process of railway development in the Gold Coast. The construction of railways in some areas of the Gold Coast was determined by both the idea of gaining control over the area and the resource benefits. For instance, the Western and Eastern rail lines were both politically and economically beneficial. They opened the country to European commercial activity. To fulfil the condition of maintaining the colony (effective occupation), the building of railways provided a conducive environment for European firms to operate in Asante and the Eastern Province. This was crucial to making the colony busy so that the colony could be maintained. In this regard, railway development

was not only to help in strengthening colonial power but also to enhance the acquisition of resources.

The power of the government continued to soar even during the periods of crisis- First World War (1914-1918), and the Great Depression (1929). The situation of economic resurgence brought about the introduction of a Ten-Year Development Plan from 1919 to 1929 under the Guggisberg administration. These British officials among others had railway schemes that inured to their own benefit. The various discussions that ensued in the location of the Eastern and Central railways symbolized how the consolidation of power was essential in the transportation of resources in the Gold Coast. In fact, railway schemes within this period under Guggisberg were an epitome of a full spectrum of British capitalism that was to purposely revamp its ragged economy.

Finally, the thesis has explained how various discontents and accompanying radical politics and labour activism of aggrieved workers of the Railway Union emerged during the “Second Colonial Occupation”. The Second Colonial Occupation was the period between 1940 and 1960 when Britain and France renewed efforts to build infrastructure and prime the production sector in colonies that had been neglected for years. The dissatisfaction of the local people emanated from the devastating economic effects of the Great Depression and the Second World War. The impact of these historical events made colonialism more exploitative in the sense that the colony was often manipulated by the mother country to enrich its economy. Such manipulations and exploitations eventually translated into high inflation, lower income earnings and high cost of living. With

very courageous leaders like Pobee Biney and Frank Woode, the Gold Coast Railway African Workers Union became a very significant political tool that supported the national political activism of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party in the struggle for independence of the Gold Coast. The bravery, consistency and radicalism of the leaders and members of the union represented a very significant expansion of official union membership in the Gold Coast. The workers' full support for the 1950 strike and declaration of "Positive Action" yielded very positive results in the political history of the Gold Coast by establishing the first Ghanaian Government which brought independence even closer. It is obvious that the tool (railway development) used by the colonial authorities to consolidate colonial power was the same tool used by the Railway Workers to overthrow colonial rule in the Gold Coast.

The thesis in general has expanded the scope of the existing literature on railway policies, investments, and politics in the Gold Coast by providing significant insights into the dual role of railways in the colonial endeavour of the Gold Coast. The thesis does not only add to the literature on how railways established and entrenched colonial rule but also goes a long way to add to the literature on how railway workers were instrumental in the decolonisation process of the Gold Coast.

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