

# Politicization of Chieftaincy in Africa: A Case Study of Bono Kyempim, Ghana

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## Abstract

This paper examines the active participation of some Bono chiefs in partisan politics in Ghana in the 1950s. Using interviews, archival data and books as the main sources of information and a qualitative approach, the research reveals that Asante's administrative strategies thwarted Bono chiefs' efforts to assert their autonomy from Asante rule in the pre-1950 era. The original aim of the Bono Kyempim Federation, formed in 1949, was to unite the chiefs' ranks to rebuild the Bono Manso kingdom, destroyed by Asante in the eighteenth century. However, the chiefs eventually associated themselves with politicians and by 1959, a Bono-Ahafo Region had been created by the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), the political party that the chiefs supported. How far-reaching was the chiefs' relations with politicians?

**Keywords:** autonomy, Asanteman, Chieftaincy, colonialism, politics

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## INTRODUCTION

The chieftaincy institution in Ghana comprises the chief, queenmother, traditional priests, religious practitioners and other traditional functionaries and has since pre-colonial times been the medium for the expression of social, political, religious and economic authority. The chief is father of the traditional state and the main priest. These roles make him an important representative and the legitimate link between the ancestors and the living (Yankah, 1995: 13). By ritual performances on his enthronement, the chief acquires the character traits of the ancestors, a sacred personality, authority, power and the legal status to rule. To recognize the transformation of his person, the Akan chief is given the title *Nana*, which is reserved for the ancestors only (Sarpong, 1971: 54). The *Nana* title legitimizes him or her as the rightful ancestor with the mandate of the ancestors to rule the community in line with their values, ideas and traditions. With his counselors' support, the chief exercises executive, judicial, military and religious powers and ensures the maintenance of law and order in his traditional state. He collaborates with his elders to prevent external attacks, punish criminals and dispense justice. The chief is the custodian of land which he supervises for his people. He is obliged to celebrate festivals and perform ceremonies to strengthen ties with the ancestors and to remind him of his closeness to the ancestors (Akropong, 1991: 197). As a sacred person, the chief ceases to be chief anytime his actions run contrary to his office. He exhibits high moral standards, seeks to bind the society together and to preserve the moral life bequeathed by the ancestors (Akropong, 1991: 175). As such, citizens expect the chief to exhibit goodconduct, including kindness, gentleness, generosity, care and more importantly, fairness and neutrality in partisan politics (Akropong, 1991: 175). Contrary to this expectation, several Ghanaian chiefs actively

participated in national politics in the immediate pre-independence era in Ghana's political history. This article seeks to discuss the origins and significance of this important historical development in Ghana's political history among the Bono people of central Ghana.<sup>1</sup>

## CHIEFTAINCY IN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Chieftaincy is one of the intriguing and complex areas of study on the African continent due to the important role it plays in the traditional society. It is an enduring traditional institution in Ghana and has displayed remarkable resilience from pre-colonial through colonial and post-colonial times (Odotei and Awedoba, 2006: 11). Different scholars in different disciplines have comprehensively discussed the institution since colonial times in Ghana. For example, the scholarly articles in Awedoba and Odotei (2006) have discussed relations between chiefs in ethnic groups and the executive, legislative, judiciary, military, economic and religious functions of chiefs. These articles have helped to explain why the chieftaincy institution still commands influence in Ghana in the twenty-first century, despite the entrenchment of democratic rule and the expansion of state powers. Other studies, including, Busia's comprehensive study of chieftaincy in Asante (1968), Rathbone (2000), Jean M. Allman (1993), John Dunn and AF Robertson (1973), and Meyerowitz (1962), have also examined chiefs, chieftaincy disputes and the behaviour of royal families using both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> Bono is an Akan word that is used to refer to the people and traditional states in most parts of the study area. Earliest European writers wrote it as Brong. Since the nineteenth century, Brong, instead of Bono has been used in official records. Asante was also written more often as 'Ashanti' by both the British colonial authorities and many scholars since colonial times.

Although studies in chieftaincy are extensive, continuous research of the institution is crucial in view of the role the institution plays in the Ghanaian society. The involvement of chiefs in partisan politics, and its significance in particular, needs a comprehensive study and that is what this research seeks to do. Apart from adding to current historiography on chieftaincy studies, this paper supports the assertion that chieftaincy in Ghana came under intense pressure during the regime of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first Prime Minister and President from 1951 to 1966. It argues however that unlike other chiefdoms that suffered under Nkrumah, Bono chieftaincy benefitted from the Nkrumah government's policies on chieftaincy. The author believes also that literature on relations between national politics and chieftaincy in Ghana is inadequate as partisan politics has been practiced in Ghana since the late 1940s. The author hopes that this study will further explain the reasons for Bono-Ahafo chiefs' involvement in politics in the 1950s and add to ongoing studies on the significance of the chieftaincy institution in Ghana in the twenty-first century.

## SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

As a historical research, the author relied on archival material, secondary data and personal interviews. He sought to use archival resources as much as possible but finding them was very difficult because early European scholars did not see Bono as an Asante territory but as part of Asante. They only mentioned important historical developments in the Bono area in passing. Besides, some useful information on Bono chieftaincy in the national and regional archives of Ghana are missing or where they are available, are not usable anymore because lawyers have since 1959 overused files to contest numerous interstate and intrastate chieftaincy and land disputes. Chiefs and the

elderly with sufficient knowledge about historical developments in Bono-Ahafo are no more, and those living are unwilling to divulge past information about their states' relations with politicians. The author is therefore grateful to Nana Kofi Aboagye, chief linguist of Takyiman (now deceased), Mr. Samuel Adane, a retired educationist, Nana Yeboa Asuama, a sub-chief, Dormaa-Ahenkro, and the few other respondents, who willingly granted the author face-to-face oral interviews. Some respondents would however, only discuss current issues in the Bono chieftaincy system and referred the author to published books on Asante by Busia (1968), Ward (1948), *A History of the Gold Coast*, Claridge (1915), *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti*, and other authors. In the absence of unused sources, the research relied mainly on the limited archival data, information provided by respondents and secondary data.

## ORIGINS OF THE BONO CHIEFTAINCY CRISIS

The Bono area, currently referred to as "Brong", comprises the twenty-one administrative districts in the northern half of the Bono-Ahafo Region.<sup>2</sup> The northern part of the Bono area has boundaries with the Northern Region of Ghana. To the south with the Ahafo district and the Asante Region, to the east with the Volta Region and to the west with Cote d'Ivoire. It is estimated that the Bono region has a geographical area of about 9,624 square miles.<sup>3</sup> The Bono are an Akan ethnic group and speak a dialect which is distinct from that

<sup>2</sup> The government of Ghana keeps creating districts across the country. It has since 13 February 2019 divided the Bono-Ahafo Region into Bono North, Bono and Ahafo Regions.

<sup>3</sup> For the estimated size of Bono, see PRAAD' K, ARG 1/20/4/81. Annual Report, Western Province of Asante 1934-1935. The population of Bono in 1934-35 was estimated at about 182,000. The estimated population of Ghana is about thirty million in February, 2019.

of Asante. They are distinguished from Asante also on the basis of the days of occurrence of their main periodic festivals such as *abonome* which falls on Wednesday, Thursday and Fridays; whilst the Asante have the *akwasidae* which falls on Sundays (Arhin, 1979: 9). Nana Akumfi Ameyaw, former chief of Takyiman, an ancient Bono town, says that the true Bono are citizens of Takyiman and that the term Bono is derived from Bono Manso, the name of the first Akan kingdom to the north of Asante established in the thirteenth century. This is corroborated by earliest writers on Ghana, including, Dupuis (1824) and Bowdich (1819). Rattray (1932), *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterlands*, identified the true Bono as “citizens of Takyiman, or the state bordering on Wankyi” (Rattray, 1932: 33). *Abronfo* (sing. *Bron ni*), and *Bouromy* were terms used as reference names by the European writers above to describe the Bono people and the geographical area. The Mande-speaking aboriginal inhabitants in the Begho area referred to them as the Brong/Bono. By 1900, the aboriginal inhabitants in the Berekum, Dormaa-Ahenkro, Nsoatre, Odomase and the Sunyane areas were all called ‘Bono’ by their southern and northern neighbours because of their closeness to the famous Bono Manso state.

The Bono Manso state dates back several centuries. Relations between them and their neighbours, including Asante, in pre-colonial times, were friendly. This allowed Asante farmers to settle on Bono land and create permanent settlements. Asante traders and hunters were not disturbed while going about their hunting and trading activities. Oral tradition of Takyiman, asserts that some immigrants intermarried with the Bono people and some consulted deities such as *Guakro*, *Taa kora* and *Taa Mensa*. The tradition asserts that the Asante were permitted to dig for gold on Bono land and to receive from Bono chiefs the one-sixth portion given to all Bono miners (Arhin (ed.) 1979: 3-4). In the eighteenth

century however, Asante defeated the Bono towns, incorporated them into the expanding Asante kingdom and placed them under the supervision of Asante chiefs in Kumase, the Asante capital.

As vassal states of Asante, the Bono chiefs dutifully paid an annual tribute of slaves, cows, sheep, cotton cloth and some silk products. They provided between six thousand and twelve thousand able-bodied men to join the Vanguard Division of the Asante army; a position in which they were used as shock troops (Wilks, 1975: 243). Bono chiefs’ lands were placed under the supervision of rival states, they paid part of the Kumasi chief’s war debt and divided revenue derived from their villages between themselves and the Asantehene. Also, on their conquest in 1723, the Bono king and the queen, as well as prominent citizens were captured and treasury of the state plundered. Bono states were made to purchase their commodities from the Asante middlemen who controlled trade in that kingdom. Despite serving Asante faithfully, Asante mistreated the Bono chiefs and their states. For instance, in 1875, Asante, with support of some loyal Bono states, occupied Takyiman because the latter did not provide men to fight in Asante wars (Wilks, 1975: 271). Takyiman was swiftly defeated, compelling Nana Kwabena Fofie, the chief and his supporters to flee to Gyaman, a neighbouring kingdom. By 1883, ‘the Bono had lost territory and Takyiman incorporated into the ‘province’ of the Abora state’ (Goody and I. Watt, 1968: 1).

In view of these cases of mistreatment, the Bono always wanted the fall of Asante. The Takyiman people used the opportunity offered them by their annual *Apuo* festival to point out Asante’s ungratefulness and to express their delight at Asante’s troubles. In an apparent claim that it was the Bono who introduced the *nsennee* (gold weights) to Asante, Takyiman *apuo* festival songs taunted; “we made scales for the Asante porcupines,

they only used them to cheat us. The Asante chiefs may have bought them but they did not buy us” (Rattray, 1932: 39). When the British captured Nana Prempeh I of Asante in 1896, Takyiman *apuo* festival songs taunted Asante by saying; “They know nothing about guns, had they known about guns, would they have let the whiteman to seize their king Prempeh and Yaa Akyaa, the queenmother without firing a gun?” (Rattray, 1929: 104). The Bono could not assert autonomy because they were divided states and were overawed by the Asante army.

### BONO IN THE ERA OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE

Following the British government’s annexation of Asante in 1901, the Asante Native Administrative Ordinance (NAO) (1902), was passed to enforce the annexation order. Under this, the Bono were placed in the Western Province of Asante and Kumasi chiefs were forbidden from their involvement in matters involving Bono towns. Each Asante division was to regulate its own internal affairs under the direct supervision of District Commissioners (DCs); thus allowing for direct British interference in chieftaincy affairs and Bono assertion of autonomy.

Unfortunately for the Bono, the British included their states in the restored Asante Confederacy in 1935, proclaiming that the political amalgamation of the Asante and the Bono would make for a stronger state and make administration easier (Petition of the Takyimanhene, 1949: 34). Accordingly, at a durbar held in Kumasi on 31 January 1935 to officially restore the confederacy, Sir Arnold Hudson, Governor of the Gold Coast, formally declared Nana Prempeh II as the first Asantehene in the Twentieth Century. The Bono chiefs considered the loss of their land and independence as very serious and threatened to

secede from the confederacy. The Takyimanhene, in particular, petitioned the colonial government and took legal action to reclaim his land. The British, who were bent on ensuring success of the indirect rule policy in a united Asante, however, ignored the Takyiman chief’s petitions and threats to secede, but compelled Takyiman to remain in the Asante confederacy (PRAAD, BRG 2/2/33: 17).

On 13 February 1948, eighty-six chiefs, sub-chiefs, elders and youth leaders of the Takyiman traditional state presented a petition to the colonial authorities, requesting their suspension from the Asante Confederacy Council.<sup>4</sup> Nana Ameyaw I, chief of Takyiman, accused Asante of destroying Bono custom and tradition. He terminated all forms of communication with the Asantehene and stopped paying the Asante National Fund. In June 1948, the chief and other chiefs formed the Bono Kyempim Federation (BKF) to rebuild the ancient Bono kingdom and to restore the glorious heritage of the Bono villages (Arthur, 1965: 50). Takyiman left the confederacy under the pretext that the inclusion of the Asantehene in the Committee of Privileges, formed to address land issues in Asante, gave Asante undue advantage (PRAAD’S RAO 2/104: 19). On 28 August 1948, Nana Ameyaw wrote to the *Asanteman* (Asante Confederacy Council) and the Chief Commissioner of Asante, informing them about Takyiman’s withdrawal from the confederacy (Arhin (ed.), 1979: 23). All attempts to persuade Ameyaw failed. The British Colonial authorities even planned to exile him forcing the chief to seek asylum in Cote d’Ivoire. On the orders of the Chief Commissioner, the District Commissioner of Wankyi closed down the Takyiman Native Authority in late July 1948 and ignored all appeals by the Takyiman chief to the British to restore his authority. The plight of the people

<sup>4</sup> Takyiman became a more popular name in the twentieth century and it is currently seat of the paramount chief and capital town of the newly-created Bono North Region.

of Takyiman worsened when the British withheld all grants to schools in the district, forcing the Takyiman people to administer the schools themselves and to voluntarily donate towards the well-being of teachers in its schools.

The Takyimanhene regarded the British government's interferences in affairs of his state as unjust, an illegal aggression, and an effort to dismember his state. In particular, the chief saw the Committee of Privileges as direct undermining tactics of Major FW Jackson and the Committee's decision to keep nine of Takyiman villages under Asante's control as conspiracy by government and Asante to destroy his state. The opportunity for the Bono to permanently exit the Asante Confederacy came in early 1954 when some young men in Kumase, the Asante capital, formed the National Liberation Movement (NLM) to contest the 1954 national elections. Thereafter the Bono struggles with Asante entered the arena of national politics.

## BONO CHIEFS AND NATIONAL POLITICS

The NLM aimed to achieve a federal independent Ghana with a liberal-democratic constitution and so declared Asante a nation (Austin, 1964: 206). Although this objective appealed to Asante ethnic nationalist sensibilities, they ran counter to Bono expectations. Accordingly, the Bono chiefs immediately declared support for the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP), the NLM's political opponent. This immediately threatened unity in the Bono area, due partly to the long relations between Bono and Asante. This threat to unity played out well in the Dormaa traditional state where Nana Kwasi Ansu, of Mansen, also called Wamfie, a divisional state, refused to join the BKF so as to get the opportunity to deal with the chief of Dormaa, his closest neighbour and rival. He hoped also that an NLM victory would be

synonymous with his triumph over the Dormaaahene. The secessionist call of the NLM to withdraw the Asante nation from the rest of the Gold Coast also tied in closely with the Mansenhene's secessionist campaign to be an independent state.

Bafuor Akoto, an Asante linguist, quickly approached the Mansen chief to persuade him to join the NLM. He granted the Mansen chief's request for paramountcy and admitted him to the Asanteman Council (Amponsah, 1980: 18). Mansenhene, the then ardent supporter of Nkrumah, thus left the CPP with a section of his subjects and pursued his secession efforts with extra seriousness as NLM member (Kodie, Interview). Henceforth, the Mansen traditional state became one of the notable NLM outposts in Bono where Asante and the NLM perpetuated their interests. Pro-Asante chiefs and their pro-BKF opponents in Dormaa and other Bono states became respective leaders of the NLM and the CPP, and the rallying points of affiliation to the two parties (Kodie, Interview). The pro-NLM states became known as *matemehofoo* (secessionists) with the slogan *matemeho* (secession). From this period, chieftaincy in Dormaa and Mansen became deeply politicized as the CPP supported the Bono chiefs and NLM supported Asante chiefs. Their chiefs tried to outwit each other with support of the political parties (Arhin (ed), 1979: 29).

Nana Agyeman Badu I, the Dormaaahene, and a staunch leader of the Bono chiefs' federation, who had formerly opposed the CPP, now in 1954, campaigned at rallies for the CPP and asked his divisional chiefs to do likewise (Austin, 1964: 143-144). On his advice, the Bono chiefs' movement changed its name from the Bono Kyempim Federation (BKF) to Bono Kyempim Council (BKC) to ensure that the BKF, a Bono separatist movement was not confused with the Asante agitation for a Federal State (The Pioneer, September 27, 1954: 6).

The CPP persecuted the Mansen chief, exiled him and thirteen other leading members of the *matemeho* faction and enstooled pro-Asante chiefs in their place. The Mansen territory was gradually annexed and fully incorporated into the Dormaa union of states as sub-chiefs of the Dormaa state (Kodie, Interview). This CPP's relations with the BKF chiefs enhanced the image of Nana Badu who was often included in important national assignments (Anonymous author: Commemorative Brochure, 1998: 13). At the same time, anti-NLM sentiments increased in the BKC strongholds and vice-versa. For example, in May 1955, Nana Badu and Nana Kwasi Yeboah, his linguist, were arrested in Kumase by the Kumasi palace police during a visit to the city (Kodie, Interview). Similarly, Nana Bosesa Gyinantwi III, the Drobohene of Bono was harassed by the Asantehene's servants while he was in Kumasi (Gyeabour, Interview). Part of an anonymous letter of 5 June 1955, complaining about cases of intimidation in Kumase, the Asante capital stated;

Four to five days ago, the Asantehene have [sic] ordered some youngmen to beat all the subjects of the Dormaahene whom [sic] are staying in Kumasi... for the sole reason that their master Dormaahene has refused to serve the Asantehene anymore (PRAAD'S BRG 2/2/58: 101).

By December 1955, all efforts, including that of the Asante Youth Association (AYA) to resolve the Bono-Asanteman crisis had been unsuccessful. Rather, the CPP announced its preparedness to create the Bono-Ahafo region. This was in spite of the many problems this posed, including, determining the size of the proposed administrative unit, determining the position of the Ahafo district, which lies close to Bono but also had traditional links with Kumasi and lastly demarcating the regional boundaries to avoid cutting across traditional

allegiances. The issue of whether Takyiman (the earliest state in Bono) or Sunyane (seat of the District Commissioner of the Western Province of Asante) should be selected as regional capital also existed. More seriously, chiefs of the Banda, Kintampo, Nkoranza and Wankyi traditional states, located in Bono, consistently resisted the CPP's proposal to divide Asante into two regions. They were worried about the increased cases of violence, arson and anarchy in the Asante Confederacy believing that there would be more violence if the Asante Region was divided. These states had regularly sent telegram messages to Nkrumah to withdraw the planned division of Asante (PRAAD'S BRG 2/2/22, 1955: 34). The chief of Wankyi for instance argued;

The proposed division of Asante will lead to more strife, bloodshed, create great confusion and hamper ancient constitution of the people. It will also intensify the dispute, and thereby prevent peaceful co-existence in the Asante confederacy (Ashanti Pioneer, 6 April 1955: 9).<sup>5</sup>

He and his people held that the decision to create the Bono Region was for political convenience and would not augur well for traditional states' relations and the Bono people generally. In a letter to the *Ashanti Pioneer* on 6 April 1955, the chief and his elders again declared that Nkrumah's method was "communist, would create confusion in Ashanti, and was calculated to divert attention of the CPP from the Asanteman Council to the Bono Kyempim Council to give them a respite."

For the sake of peace, Bekyem, a pro-Asante state in Bono, which had joined the

<sup>5</sup> PRAAD'S RAO 2/58: 19. The Wankyiman grievance stated; "We the members of the Wankyi state council shall not take this challenge lying down. We have fought and defeated Nkrumaism in the Wankyi state, and we shall fight it relentlessly and uproot it completely from the whole country ... we shall refuse to recognize the BKC if it is set up."

BKC in 1954, and some pro-BKC states opposed any attempt to include them in the Bono region.<sup>6</sup> On his part, Nana Twene Kwadwo of Suma Ahenkuro and his elders, and the chiefs of Drobo, Fiapre, Nsuatre and Sunyani sent telegram messages to oppose what they called “forceful disintegration of Asante by government” (PRAAD’S BRG 2/2/22, 1955: 29). They asked the CPP government to withdraw the purpose to ensure peace and tranquility between the Bono and the Asante peoples. The Drobo state threatened to rejoin the Asanteman Council if the CPP pursued its agenda, arguing that they and the Bono would generally be successful with Asante as a single state instead of the CPP dividing Asante into two regions (PRAAD’S BRG 2/2/45, 1955: 27). Thus instead of gaining support, the BKC rather lost grounds following the announcement to create the Bono region.

By 1957, only Abease, Dormaa, and Takyiman, who sought to triumph in their land disputes with Asante remained as strongholds of the Bono Council. Other states had shifted grounds to support the NLM, compelling the Bono chiefs to write to these states stating that the Prime Minister’s statement coincided with their logical course to create democratic institutions for the chiefs and people of Ghana (PRAAD’S BRG 2/2/45, 1955: 1). The argument against the creation of a separate Bono region was justified because by 1955, the protracted political rivalry between pro-CPP and pro-NLM factions in Bono was unsolved. Some chiefs would not know whether to owe traditional allegiance to Asante or to the Bono Kyempim House of chiefs, if a new region was created. The CPP however gave little considerations to these concerns; feeling that traditional loyalties must be overlooked when determining the borders of a region for administrative purposes.

In Bono however, protracted disputes over traditional allegiance needed to be re-

<sup>6</sup> PRAAD’S BRG 2/2/22. Bekyemhene to Asantehene, 5 April 1955.

solved. For example, by the 1950s, the chiefs of Sunyane and Odomase had failed to form one local council due to their differences regarding traditional allegiance; resulting in the emergence of three separate Local Authorities, in a relatively small area, namely, the Sunyani Urban Council, the Sunyani Area Local Council and the Sunyani District Council (Yeboah, Research Paper, 1990: 23).

This notwithstanding, the Bono chiefs intensified their pressure for autonomy, following the announcement to create the region. For instance, in a petition to the CPP in October 1955, the Bekyemhene, who had been destooled by the Kumasi State Council, threatened to leave the CPP if the government failed to restore him and recognize the BKC as a separatist movement (Arhin (ed.), 1979: 121). The CPP government immediately amended the State Council of Asante Ordinance of 1952, which paved the way for the Bekyemhene and other chiefs to secure the right of appeal to government to be reinstated. On the other hand, Asanteman and the NLM unsuccessfully opposed the amendment of the Ordinance, arguing that it was a direct attack on the constitutional heritage and culture of the Asante nation (Arhin (ed.), 1979: 141).

## EMERGENCE OF THE BONO-AHAFO REGION

The Bono chiefs’ struggles with Asante coincided with a debate at the national level in 1955 as to what kind of constitution independent Ghana should have, and whether there should be another national election after the 1954 one, before Ghana attains independence. By early 1955, a constitutional stalemate existed between the ruling CPP and the opposition NLM, and to resolve it, government invited Sir Fredrick Bourne, an expert on constitutional matters to advise concerning the proposed Bono region (Boahen, 1975: 186-187). In his

report, Bourne advised against creation of the region asserting that it was not necessary for so small a country because the inhabitants are divided on the issue of secession. Despite Bourne's advice, the BKC members argued that a separate region would facilitate Bono development and let the Bono feel that they were part of the country. The people of Dormaa, a Bono town, for instance, complained that the Asante regional commissioners lacked an interest in their welfare and so rarely visited them (PRAAD'S BRG 28/21/12, 1955: 111). To resolve the stalemate, the CPP invited both the NLM and the BKC to a conference at Achimota in Accra, in February 1956, to further discuss the future system of government for Ghana but the NLM declined the invitation.

At the Legislative Assembly of Ghana too, members were divided on the Bono question. But as expected, the majority CPP members used their position to provide the needs of the BKC. For example, on 21 February 1955, the Assembly adopted a private motion by SW Yeboah, CPP Member of Parliament for Sunyani asking for publication of the Achimota Conference Report (Gold Coast Legislative Assembly Debates, 1955: 43). This was followed by a concession to Bono expectation when in March 1955, Nkrumah, the Prime Minister of Ghana, read a statement on the Bono-Asante dispute in the Legislative Assembly and recommended to the Governor to publish the Report of the Mate Korle Committee established in 1951 to resolve the dispute. Nkrumah also presented to the Assembly, the BKC's petition that announced secession of the Bono traditional states from the Asante-man Council. The Achimota Conference's Report, released the same year, recommended to government to set up Regional Assemblies and a Bono (Kyempim) House of Chiefs.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> The appellation of the Bono kingdom is *Bono Kyempim duduakwa* meaning "Bono planter of thousands." Their tradition asserts that at the peak of their glory, they had built thousands of traditional states.

government in its White Paper on the Report of the Constitutional Adviser published in April 1956, expressed readiness to consult the Bono districts and local councils to get their views on plans to create the Bono-Ahafo region. The NLM rejected the government's proposal and rather insisted on a "constitution that would provide adequate safeguards for individual and minority rights and provide effective powers for the region within a unitary state framework," but they were ignored (Arhin (ed.), 1979: 143).

Government's support for the Bono chiefs helped to effectively counter anti-BKC-CPP tendencies in the Bono area and for people to openly defy Asante. It rather paved the way for pro-Bono chiefs to openly invite the CPP government to interfere in chieftaincy matters. For example, in 1956 and 1958, the chiefs of Ofuman and Tanoso near Takyiman, appealed to the CPP to intervene in the Bono-Asante conflicts in the Takyiman paramountcy. When Nana Frimpong II was enstooled as chief of Tanoso in 1958, he held that it was "inexpedient to convey stool matters once more to Kumasi or to swear the oath of allegiance to the Asantehene, because the CPP would create a new region and a House of Chiefs" (PRAAD'S BRG 3/2/14, 1958:18).

As expected, the BKC members welcomed the CPP's decision to create the Bono region and voted massively in the 1956 Presidential election by giving the CPP, four of the six parliamentary seats in the Bono area, and 41,222 votes as against 32,881 to the NLM and its allied parties. In December 1958, the CPP government introduced the Repeal and Restrictions Bill which received approval by the Queen of England in the same month. It allowed the CPP to introduce the Bill establishing the Bono-Ahafo Region and a Bono House of Chiefs into the National Assembly. On March 20, 1959, under a Certificate of Urgency, the Bill passed through the required stages and with the Governor General's approval; it

became operative on 4 April 1959, when the Bono-Ahafo Region and the Bono-Ahafo Region House of Chiefs were inaugurated in Sunyane, the Bono-Ahafo regional capital. From this period, Bono became an autonomous administrative and judicial division.

The Bono chiefs' involvement in the CPP and NLM political struggles had diverse effects on the Bono people and their institutions, including, huge monetary losses and economic decline. For example, the Takyiman state spent more than £5000 on court cases and other disputes (Aboagye, Interview, 1999). Besides, people's attention was diverted from farming, leaving foodstuffs and cash crops to rot whilst large acres of cocoa were not harvested in the mid-1950s. In 1955, there was very low output of cocoa and other farm products leading to severe hardships among farmers in the western Bono areas, particularly, Dormaa, Wamahinso and Wamfie (Adane, Interview). The Dormaa area endured severe famine, causing inhabitants to consume the corms of cocoyam; and in Takyiman and Odumase, inhabitants could not repay monies borrowed and the high interests. Additionally, the CPP mistreated the fearless, radical, and aggressive pro-Asante supporters, following the NLM's defeat in the 1956 general elections. On the contrary, pro-CPP supporters, with the tacit support of the CPP government became more aggressive, intolerant and constantly harassed pro-Asante peoples (Aboagye, Interview). As reward for their support, the CPP government provided the needs of supporters. For instance, it raised the Dormaa Secondary School to a government-assisted school and granted it a sixth-form status in 1958. It commissioned pipe borne water in Dormaa and street lights in Dormaa, Nsoatre, Sunyane, and Takyiman. In Anwiam, the government built a clinic and a post office (Adane, Interview).

On their part, residents in pro-Asante states, lacking national government's support, became self-reliant through communal labour.

For instance, the Wamfie people built the Local Authority Primary School in 1957 through communal effort. Those who had to migrate to Ahafo and the Sehwi farming areas in north-western Asante and Western Region of Ghana respectively, took to cocoa farming and by the end of the 1960s, were known to be among the very wealthy cocoa farmers in Ghana.

The period also witnessed cases of brutalities and lawlessness. For example, in May 1955, some young men, accused of planning to start a branch of the NLM in Takyiman, were summoned to the Paramount Chief's court, accused of sabotage and were whipped and fined by the traditional court (Aboagye, Interview, 1999). In Berekum, some young men attacked the chief, a well-known NLM supporter and threatened to destool him (PRAAD'S BRG 28/22/10, 1955: 3). Similar confrontations occurred between supporters of the BKC/ CPP and Asante/NLM supporters in several other Bono and Ahafo towns.<sup>8</sup>

These confrontations caused the national government to increase security in the Bono area. They restricted activities of the NLM supporters, constantly intimidated them and molested many (Kodie, Interview). The CPP government, allegedly neglected strongholds of the NLM in the provision of social amenities, whilst in some areas, social services like schools and other community projects deteriorated and town development stagnated. The Wamfie people claimed for example that tarred streets in the town were destroyed by some CPP agents (Kodie, Interview). The politicization thus divided the Bono states along political lines and stagnated progress and development.

The struggles also affected education as parents could only send their children to close-by schools. For instance, in the early 1950s, students from the pro-Asante states attended

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<sup>8</sup> See Amponsah, "The CPP/NLM Dispute," 23-30 for details. Most affected towns were Berekum, Dormaa, Drobo, Odumase, Suma-Ahenkuro, Takyiman and Wamfie.

schools in Ahafo and Asante only; whilst for fear that their wards would be kidnapped or molested by the Asante, most Bono citizens enrolled form-five leavers in the Dormaa and Takyiman high schools, which were the only sixth-form high schools in the Bono area. Many young people also stayed at home to engage in chieftaincy matters than to pursue post-basic school education.<sup>9</sup> The Bono migrants to the Ahafo and Sehwi areas could not give their children formal education because their host communities lacked schools. The low interest in high education among the youth in the Bono states persisted until the 1970s, when more schools were built and formal education became popular among the Bono and Ahafo people.

The dispute also significantly affected chiefs and the chieftaincy institution in the Bono and Asante areas. Between 1952 and 1993, the Mate Korle (1952), Bannerman (1966-1969), Ofori-Atta (1969-1972), Coussey (1973-1978) and Iddrisu Mahama (1992) Commissions of Enquiry each held several sittings and summoned chiefs from all traditional states as witnesses in Sunyane, Kumase and sometimes Accra, but this did not help to address the 'allegiance' question between the Bono-Ahafo and Asante chiefs. Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, the Asantehene, ignored the Bono-Ahafo House of Chiefs, often elevated some chiefs in Bono-Ahafo to paramount status and asked these chiefs to owe him allegiance and loyalty. Against government directive, the king, in 1996, elevated chiefs in the Bono-Ahafo Region to paramount status, amidst protests by the Bono House of Chiefs. In 1988, the Asantehene, wrote to JJ Rawlings, Head of State of Ghana, to protest against government's interference in Asante and Bono chieftaincy issues.

Asante's interference in Bono affairs also

caused a confrontation between Asante and Bono citizens at Tuobodom in 1998 resulting in forced migration, destruction of properties and deaths (Agyekum, 2008: 481-482). In March 2008, Nana Akumfi Ameyaw IV, *Omanhene* of the Takyiman traditional area, accused Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the Asante king, of usurping his traditional powers by installing a new paramount chief at Tuobodom. He described the Otumfuo's action as "unacceptable since Tuobodom is within the Takyiman traditional area." The Takyiman chief wondered why the Asantehene, wanted certain villages and towns in the Takyiman (Bono) paramountcy to owe him allegiance (Agyekum, 2008: 481-482). For the Takyimanhene, Asantehene's interference was "tantamount to slavery, it foments trouble, disturbs peace, and sows seeds of discord," as these areas were outside the Asante kingdom (Agyekum, 2008: 482). In Tuobodom, tension existed in 2008, a year after the Asante king enstooled a paramount chief. On this issue, Takyimanhene accused the Asantehene of "setting the stage for hatred between chiefs in the two regions instead of uniting them."

These inter- and intrastate disputes, allegations and accusations were part of the long-term effects of the CPP government's policy on chieftaincy and the eventual involvement of Bono chiefs in politics in Ghana in the 1950s. The rippling effects of Bono chiefs' active involvement in partisan politics have still not been completely resolved in Bono-Ahafo despite efforts by government and well-meaning Ghanaians to see peace, stability and cordial relations between the Bono and their Asante neighbours in the twenty-first century. The latest interstate flare-up happened in October 2018 between pro-Asante Gyapekrom and pro-Bono Drobo neighbouring traditional states in the Bono-Ahafo Region.

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<sup>9</sup> See *The Christian Messenger*, monthly newspaper of 21 June 1930. In 1930, the British Colonial government established the first elementary school in Sunyane, the Bono-Ahafo regional capital.

## AHAFO RELATIONS WITH BONO AND ASANTE

Lying to the southwestern part of the Bono-Ahafo Region is Ahafo. Most Ahafo communities, feel closer affinity to Asante than to Bono because the Ahafo people speak Asante-Twi, not Bono, and have closer cultural, economic and geographical affinity to Kumase.<sup>10</sup> In the 1970s, Mmemhene (chief of the Mmem town), insisted that he would not join the Bono-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs because he is an Asante-speaking man. He argued that the Bono “are quite different people; they are Bono... and we are Asante, we have a boundary between Bono and Ahafo. I can’t join them because I am a different man” (Dunn J. and Robertson, 1973: 32). The Ayomsohene (chief of Ayomso) asserted that Ahafo relates to Kumase more closely because “Kumase is the centre of Ghana.” He said, “if you need anything, you have to go there” (Dunn J. and Robertson, 1973: 32).

Mr. S. K. Opoku, a former CPP Member of Parliament in Ahafo summarizes the Ahafo sentiments thus,

My tribe is Asante, for Ahafo is not a tribe, we are Asante ... since colonial days when the Assistant Commissioner was in Sunyane, all administrative matters were taken to Sunyane... **For administrative purposes** we are more closely related to Sunyane than Asante. (Dunn J. and Robertson, 1973: 32. Emphasis added.)

<sup>10</sup> Their traditions assert that the area they now occupy was given to them by the Asante King. Most Ahafo settlements trace their origins to Kumasi and its immediate villages. Ahafo was originally a thick forest with plentiful game and wild edible fruits. The soil favoured farming and this attracted people from Asante to settle in the Ahafo forest for farming and hunting purposes. Their ancestors used to say *eha ye fo* (life is easier here). This eventually became Ahafo. Other traditions say that Ahafo is a corruption of the Akan word *Aharyuorfuor* (hunters).

The Goaso chief observed; “I don’t go to Sunyane unless I have trouble.” (Dunn J. and Robertson, 1973: 32). Thus the Ahafo saw Sunyane, the Bono capital, as significant only as a regional administrative center. It was a base for the Circuit Court, the Regional Officer, the regional police and the place of meeting of the Regional House of Chiefs.

This notwithstanding, Bono, Ahafo and Asante, have largely co-existed peacefully since 1959, but a section of the First Schedule of the Brong-Ahafo Act has caused troubles amongst them. It states that the creation of the region did not affect land, native rights and customary law in Asante and Bono-Ahafo. This has allowed Asante chiefs to often interfere in Bono and Ahafo chieftaincy affairs after 1959. Kumase chiefs still claim parts of Ahafo and Bono as their land and assert their rights to demand rent and allocate land because they once ruled over these areas.

This interference in Ahafo chief’s affairs have also caused mutual suspicion, inter- and intrastate tension and flare-ups in the Ahafo area. The Ahafo have since 1959 disliked their inclusion in the Bono-Ahafo Region; regarding it as a political decision by Nkrumah to favour himself and his party. The Ahafo have since 1959 yearned for their own region. The ruling National Patriotic Party (NPP) government of Ghana, has since 13 February 2019, created the Ahafo Region. The NPP supports the ideology of the United Party (UP) that had vehemently opposed the creation of the Bono-Ahafo Region in 1959.

## **CONCLUSION**

Chiefs of the Bono traditional states reluctantly joined the Asante Confederacy when it was restored in 1935 with Prempeh II as King. In 1936, the Takyiman chief and other chiefs in Bono, announced their secession from the confederacy, protesting against the membership, composition and decision of the Committee of Privileges established to address land issues in Asante. They opposed Asante's change of the name of the Confederacy Council to Asanteman Council, Bono chiefs swearing of the Asantehene's oath, the establishment of the confederacy's court in Kumasi, the exaction of high court fines, unfairness in the disbursement of the Asante National Fund, and awarding of the Asanteman scholarship to Asante citizens only. The Bono chiefs believed that the British colonial authorities connived with Asante for the latter to resume its pre-colonial position.

Between 1948 and 1954, the Bono chiefs' efforts to attract the CPP's support were fruitless. In 1954 however, the CPP changed its position and lent full support to the BKC

when the NLM was formed in Kumasi, supported by the Asante royal family and the Asanteman Council. Following the passage of the Bono-Ahafo Act, the Bono-Ahafo Region was created as an autonomous region in 1959. The Bono chiefs' alliance with the CPP, however, affected the social and economic lives of the Bono chiefs and their citizens, including high legal fees, sporadic physical attacks, emergence of protracted chieftaincy disputes, conflicts between political party opponents, forced migration and low enrolment of children in schools. The Bono chiefs' alliance with the CPP also caused disaffection, dislike and mutual suspicion between Bono chiefs and Asante chiefs. The suspicion and mistrust between the Bono and Asante have persisted, despite several efforts by national governments and chiefs to ensure peace and order in the Bono, Ahafo and Asante traditional areas. The Ahafo trace their ancestry to Asante and have since 1966 agitated against their inclusion in the Bono region. Although geographically, Ahafo is a small area, the NPP created it as an autonomous Ahafo Region after a successful referendum in December 2018.

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2. Nana Yeboah Kodie, *Aduanahene*, Sub-chief of Dormaa-Ahenkro, knowledgeable in the history, tradition and custom of the Bono states as a whole. Among the few who granted the author an interview at Dormaa-Ahenkro – 19 June 2009.
3. Nana Ansu Gyeabuor, *Adomankomahene*, sub-chief of Dormaa-Ahenkro, knowledgeable in chieftaincy, custom and history of the Bono-Ahafo people. One of the few chiefs who granted author an interview at Dormaa-Ahenkro – 19 June 2009.
4. Mr. Samuel Adane, Retired-educationist, eye-witness of partisan politics in the 1950s and its impact on the Bono-Ahafo society. Agreed to a request for an interview at Sunyani – 21 June 2009.

